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MATTHEW FURTH

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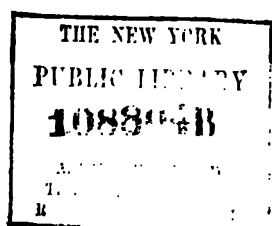
AUTHOR OF "A PAIR OF LOVERS," ETC.



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MATTHEW FURTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE corner of the bridge was the centre of argument. Sometimes it was the gossip of the place that was talked over, sometimes it was the political outlook, sometimes it was socialism, sometimes it was the possibility that the English are the lost tribes. On this last point the three gentlemen were agreed, or, to speak more accurately, Mr. Crapp and Mr. Cockle were agreed and Mr. Peckitt acquiesced.

"Yes," Mr. Crapp would say, thumping his sweet-stall so that the peppermint rock rattled against the toffee, "there's no doubt to my notion that we are the lost tribes, no doubt whatever, nor there couldn't be to any that was enlightened or had investigated the matter.

We're unconsciously fulfilling prophecy. We are masters of the world. Where's the riches and the power like England has? Other countries may sound richer with their francs and their dollars and their marks, but that's much as if we should speak in shillings. No; England, with her solid pounds, beats 'em all."

"Naming prophecy," was Mr. Cockle's rejoinder, "you've only to turn to Psalm lxxiv., and there's a singular coincidence that's most convincing. What do we find? 'A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.' If anything could point that Mr. Gladstone was meant, that do."

Mr. Peckitt made his usual response which betokened approval and conviction: "Quite, quite".

This evening the discussion was on the relative happiness of the rich and the poor. The conclusions arrived at were what might have been expected from the dispositions of the speakers. Mr. Crapp was of a cheerful temperament; but Mr. Cockle was bilious. Mr. Peckitt's outlook on life and its problems was dependent on the state of his finances. Mr.



Crapp or Mr. Cockle had an adherent according as Mr. Peckitt saw his way to to-morrow's dinner.

The men had heard each other's opinions on this as on most subjects before, for never a Saturday evening passed but Mr. Cockle and Mr. Peckitt paused by Mr. Crapp's stall. But since each individual found his pleasure rather in expressing his own thoughts than in hearing what the others had to say, there was no more monotony in this than in any other common act of life.

"I don't see," remarked Mr. Crapp, "what reason you have to call them rich folk names. My opinion is that they aren't no better off than ourselves."

"They don't go hungry," ventured Mr. Peckitt, who had not found one of his best patrons at home. (Mr. Peckitt acted as morning caller to some of the dockers and engineers.)

"Hungry!" repeated Mr. Crapp. "What's hunger? There's different sorts of hunger. There's the stomach's hunger, what's common enough; there's the heart's hunger, what's common too; and there's some as have a

sperrit hunger. Granted as the rich ain't acquainted with number one, there's the other two, and I'm inclined to fancy they ain't always filled *them* ways. There's more wants than bread and cheese will satisfy, nor champagne neither."

"Quite," said Mr. Peckitt, with a mental reservation as to the beverage, with which he was acquainted only by name.

"At any rate," remarked Mr. Cockle, "they have a decent eddication and time to develop theirselves."

"Develop theirselves," repeated Mr. Crapp with scorn, and again the toffee and the peppermint rattled towards each other. "See here. When I was in the engineering line, afore I lost my arm, I understood something of machinery, and I can tell you this, if one part of a thing was disturbed it would affect the whole, and the more complicated it was the more chance it had of getting out of order. Now people's like machines."

"Quite. Ah, that's so," Mr. Peckitt said thoughtfully.

"People's like machines," repeated Mr.

Crapp, "and I take it there's many a delicate, high-strung young lady, fed well and dressed dainty, and able to read books and play insterments, that gets sufferin' out of things Selina Pask wouldn't know the meanin' of, for all she goes ragged and ain't fed over much. And the same with men. You can't take me, because I'm eddicated. I'm a thinker, but there's some of them docker chaps as it's probable could cry quits with the Prince of Wales or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Happiness is like sweets. There's different flavours, but provided they're made of pure stuff, one kind's pretty much as good as another. Some has a touch of medicine in 'em too, like peppermint rock, and I'm not sure but those are the wholesomest."

"Seems to me," remarked Mr. Cockle, "when you name sweets, that the rich are like children. They hold out their hands and have sweets put in 'em, another--and another--and another." (Mr. Cockle suited the action to the word by abstracting lozenges from Mr. Crapp's stall, so that before long the latter began to pull out the waterproof cover.)

"Presently one is dropped, and then there is such a fuss and cryin' that they quite forget to enjoy what they have in their hands."

"Ah," said Mr. Peckitt, "that's their way."

"Have you ever come to close quarters with any of them rich folks that you seem to know so much about?" inquired Mr. Crapp with severity.

"I've read about 'em in my Bible," answered Mr. Cockle with some spirit, "and where else could I go better?"

"That's so, but them in the Bible ain't English, saving"—as Mr. Cockle gave symptoms of uneasiness—"saving what are mentioned prophetical. Now I think I'm entitled to speak on the subject. For why? I'm a thinker. Yes, and I'm a reader. There's the papers what I evenshooally wraps my sweets in. What's in 'em? History's in 'em. Jography's in 'em. Human affairs is in 'em. I reads of emperors and of dooks and of costermongers. What goes to write them papers? Brains. Whose? Why, the brains of the nation. They're all stewed down as

you may say for me to consoom as I sits by this 'ere stall. I consooms 'em. What's more, I keep quiet and digests 'em. And these is my conclusions. It's a pity we don't get anigh each other, rich and poor, and try and understand each other. There's human natur' in us both, and that's a common meetin' ground. There's love in us both, there's sin in us both, there's good in us both, and one God made us. What's riches? and what's poverty? I don't believe one lot's partiklar better than the other, nor partiklar sadder, nor partiklar happier. And I don't believe all the learnin' has to be on one side nor t'other. Give and take, says I. Be philosophers. How now? Mr. Peckitt there he's blind, I've lost my arm, your wife is a worry to you. The same with the uppers. Each has his trouble and each a compensation."

Mr. Crapp pulled the cover with a jerk over the peppermint, and the rose sticks, and the toffee, and prepared to take his departure. Mr. Peckitt whistled for Eliza, his dog, and said he would accompany him.

"You spoke very sensible," he remarked, as

“Buy, buy, buy! Beef, pork, mutton! The best in the trade! Fine rump, 5d.! Who ever saw the like? Buy, buy, buy! None of your New Zealand sheep for us! Come on, ladies! see to your dinners! Don’t go past! Buy, buy, buy! Beef with no bone! Here’s your sort! Take ’em away! Pay your own price! Su—et! Buy, buy, buy!”

Now may the vendor of live fowls display the cackling poultry to the general admiration, now may the cheap-jack show his wit and eloquence, now may the street bookseller light his naphtha lamp—his books having been already uncovered and arranged—step up on to his stool, and address the group of possible purchasers which has gathered round him and his “odd lots” and “small parcels”.

“Gentlemen *and* ladies! Here’s a sight! Here’s a stock of interesting goods. It’s not often you have the chance of such a selection. They’re all before you. Take your choice. I’m not anxious to carry any of ’em back. Come now. Feed your minds as well as your bodies. Beef’s good, but literature’s better. It’s more enduring. Once eat food, and it’s

gone. But books! The oftener you go through 'em the more you'll enjoy 'em. There's enough to amuse and instruct you from the cradle to the grave, and conduct you beyond it. What have I got here? Works on medicine—no more need of pills and quacks—no more need of bills. Keep yourselves in health for tenpence halfpenny. Works on theology, more commonly known as religion. You'll be able to argue with the parson. Works of fiction, thrilling narratives to make your skin prickle and your hair stand on end, touching incidents to bring the tears into your eyes, tales of murder, and love, and dynamite; works of poetry by well-known authors, English *and* American. Now then, let's proceed to business. We'll start with the best." He takes up a volume. "Come now! Here's the works of William Shakespeare. *William* Shakespeare. Don't make any mistake. The greatest playwright ever heard of. No Englishman should be without him. Not read Shakespeare? And had a board school education! Make up for lost time. Now *here's* a chance. All complete. 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'Macbeth,' a

murder in every one of 'em. One murder? Two or three! 'The Merchant of Venice,' dealing with ancient English life. 'King John,' and other historical plays! 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' true, every word of it. Why, it's a regular 'Enquire Within upon Everything'. Here's a handsome offer. This book came out at fifteen shillings. Fifteen shillings! *I'm* not going to ask fifteen shillings. That's too much for working men to pay. No, for this well-bound and illustrated—didn't I tell you there was pictures? Othello, a nigger to the life—for this well-bound and illustrated volume I'll take two shillings and sixpence." There is a pause. "What! you won't give two shillings and sixpence? No one will give two shillings and sixpence for the works of the great national poet? Well, if you won't meet my price, I must meet yours. I'll say two shillings—one and eleven—I won't hold out for a penny—one and ten. Here, hand up the money. Don't all speak at once. One and ten. Well, if you won't give one and ten, I must keep it. I'd give it for nothing rather than make it lower. It'd be insulting the

author. Still, perhaps it won't do to be hard on you. You'd have to read it to appreciate what you've lost. See here, I won't even ask one and six for it. I'll make it half that sum. Half one and six is ninepence. Make it ninepence. Not a penny less. Who says ninepence? Now or never. Ah, that's it, sir. Well, you've got a bargain, and *no* mistake."

Now may the wily pickpocket try his professional skill upon the unwary ; now may the ragged children dive under the stalls and into the crowded road for fragments dropped from a greengrocer's stock-in-trade, or some basket filled to repletion ; now may the beggar become importunate, now may the street band and the wandering minstrels outvie each other in shrillness and in discord ; the more noise the better. It is difficult to make oneself heard above the din indeed, but what does that matter ? If there is noise, there is also gaiety.

In and out among the crowd moved Selina Pask. Selina made her way to Market Street every Saturday, and she usually went, as on this evening, alone. She had a few coppers to

spend, and she understood the art of magnifying her pleasures by the aid of imagination. To begin with, she walked straight down Market Street on one side of the pavement and back on the other side, and to all intents and purposes she had bought more things than she could carry. But what did that matter? She conjured up the image of a kind and obliging slave in the form of a young man who loved her to distraction, and he relieved her of her burdens, smiling when she turned round and said: "Here's a joint of beef, seven pounds in weight, and three pounds of potatoes; just carry 'em. And here's twenty oranges, put 'em in your pockets; and here's a cake with sugar on it, find room for that, if you please. Boots! I'll stop and buy a pair of them; I think I could manage a new pair. And that scarlet cloak'd come in handy too. I could wear it in the day and put it on my bed at night. Shrimps from Gravesend! Where's that? it don't sound a likely place for shrimps. But they look tasty. Yes, I'll have some for tea to-morrow, and a few of them whelkeses now."

In spite of the extent of her imaginary shopping, Selina's coppers still rattled in her pocket. She laid out a halfpenny at a sweet-stall where she could rely on quantity if not on quality, and thus added a needful item to the programme of her evening's enjoyment.

In the upper room of a butcher's shop a band was playing. The shop was newly opened, and this was a way of attracting customers. The musicians were placed near the window, and they were liberally supplied with beer. Their performance was spirited, if slightly discordant. Selina stood for a long while and listened to their rendering of airs from "Norma," interspersed with cries of "Buy, buy, buy! This way, mum, for juicy beef! Now then, ladies, mutton given away! Buy, buy, buy!"

There was nothing in the world which gave Selina so much pleasure as music; a barrel-organ would set feet and heart dancing, and when Cythna Mayern played or sang to her Selina was in heaven.

"Music makes me thinkyfyed," she said to Cythna once, "my heart seems to go spready, and I want something. But it ain't a hurting

want neither. That's with your sort of music," she added, "bands and organs give tunier things, more gay, but I don't know as the sad feelin' ain't the happiest."

At last she had to tear herself away from the immediate proximity of the band. There was no time to lose, for she had not only her shopping to do, but the really important business of the evening to transact. Therefore she now seriously gave her mind to her marketing and purchased a pinch of tea for which she paid three farthings, a pennyworth of ginger snaps, some odd bits of meat, and half a loaf. Then she found her way to the pawnbroker's.

Selina followed the profession by which her mother had in her last years eked out a precarious livelihood. She was a "quarter-master" or agent. Every Monday she took certain articles to the pawnbroker, and carried them back again to their owners every Saturday, receiving on the things pawned a small commission. On wet evenings it was a little trying to carry back the large and precious parcels, and sometimes she had to make more than one journey ; but her work was not on the

whole much trouble to her. She knew very well the garments on which, rather than in which, her patrons lived. There were some clothes of Mrs. Garfitt's on which the broker every time advanced eight shillings, charging twopence a week for the accommodation, and these Selina always contemplated with deep admiration, because the skirt and mantle were trimmed with fur. On Sundays Mrs. Garfitt went to church in it. There was great consternation once among the ladies of the congregation. Indeed, two or three of them ceased for a while to attend church. When the vicar inquired the reason of their non-appearance it was found that the pawnbroker had been made a sidesman, and they were convinced that they owed it to their dignity to absent themselves from the place of worship. How could they feel any pride in their appearance when that man was stalking down the church, and able to recognise the very jackets on their backs?

There was also Mrs. Gripper's velveteen. Was it Mrs. Gripper's? Selina was never quite sure to whom it did belong, for she had conducted it three or four times to Mrs. Grip-

per's house, as many to Mrs. Podson's, and lately it had always gone to Mrs. Cottage. As a matter of fact the ladies were not much surer than Selina as to who had a genuine right to the velveteen. At any rate, not one of them would have dared to make it up. Originally it belonged to Mrs. Gripper, Mr. Gripper having bought it at Greenwich as a birthday present. But the death of her husband caused the necessity of mourning, and the green velveteen had to be laid aside for a while. Then Mrs. Gripper got into debt with Mrs. Podson, and the latter being in want of ready money became an importunate creditor. Mrs. Gripper replied by offering her the right to pawn the piece of velveteen. Subsequently Mrs. Cottage, who was Mrs. Podson's dearest friend, also found herself in difficulties, and the velveteen was handed on to her for a consideration. Nevertheless, neither Mrs. Podson nor Mrs. Gripper hesitated occasionally to put away the velveteen for a week or two. It was never unfolded, but was getting slightly marked. Mrs. Gripper had expressed to Selina a desire to have it out, and accordingly the girl was

going for that and for Mrs. Garfitt's dress, and for Matthew Furth's accordion. This last transaction was the only one that gave her much interest. She had as a rule no commissions from the gentlemen of her acquaintance, and she had been much honoured by the proof of Matt's confidence, when one Monday morning he had overtaken her and given the accordion into her charge. Yesterday he had met her again and said, handing her the ticket and the money: "You might take out that instrument of mine; you needn't bring it round, I'll fetch it Sunday". It was the owner of the accordion who had been Selina's fancied escort. There were other places beside Market Street to which the big docker went with her in her imagination. Selina's life was sufficiently sor-did. She made it lovelier by day-dreams. Perhaps the day-dreams were not of a very lofty character, but they were innocent enough, and rounded off the sharp edges of her daily life. She was a lonely little creature, pretty, untidy, impulsive, ignorant, and capable of deep devotion. Perhaps there was a vein of poetry in her character, she was so sensitive to

impressions, yet she was practical, too. Her mother had been a "super" at a theatre, and had married a scene-shifter, who drank them both to death—that is to say, his ill-treatment killed her, and his excesses killed himself. Many people in the neighbourhood remembered the pretty young woman whose associations with the theatre had invested her with a certain glamour. She had given up her profession before Selina was born, and had never been able to resume it. After her tragic death Selina had lived in the same house with her grandmother, a bedridden old woman, who gave her nothing in the way of love, but kept her from being quite dependent on the charity of the world.

Every one knew Selina. Every one was fond of her. No one did anything for her, however, till Cythna appeared. The latter found in her something more than a pretty child of the slums. As for Selina, her first ideas of reverence came to her when she saw this high-born, gracious, graceful lady, and though she found her approachable, nay, anxious to be approached, full of love and eager to bestow it, familiarity did

not dim Selina's belief that Cythna Mayern was a being of another world than that in which she lived.

She bought a flower or two for Cythna now, and then went homewards slowly, because she was laden. She hummed to herself. She was happy. She passed Mr. Crapp and Mr. Peckitt when she got near the bridge, and said "good-night" in her bright young voice.

"You're pretty burdened," remarked the former.

And Selina laughed.

"Trade's brisk, you see," she answered.

She left the velveteen with Mrs. Gripper, and the fur-trimmed dress with Mrs. Garfitt, then she ran to Cythna's. She hesitated a moment as to whether she should take the accordion home before going there, but the flowers were not improved by the wind nor the crushing they had had to undergo, and she wanted them to be worthy of Mrs. Mayern's acceptance.

Cythna was playing the piano when Selina Pask knocked at her door, but on the feeble

rapping being repeated she bade her come in, and, seeing who her visitor was, rose to welcome her.

“Ma’am, don’t stop, please,” said Selina, “I likes to hear it.”

“Sit down, then,” said Cythna, smiling.

There was a little wooden stool on the hearthrug. Selina drew it closer to the fire and seated herself. The parcels containing her purchases, and the accordion, were on her lap; she laid the flowers on the hearthrug. Then clasping her arms round her knees she gave herself up to the pleasure of listening. Mrs. Mayern was playing a nocturne of Chopin’s. It might have seemed that the music was not of a style to appeal to such an uneducated mind as Selina’s, but it did so nevertheless. She may not have been able to interpret Chopin as Cythna did. But music is like love, it brings a different message to every one, yet every message is beautiful.

The firelight illumined Selina’s upturned face, which so plainly expressed the keen pleasure she experienced as the harmonies stirred in her emotions not often aroused.

"Ma'am!" she cried rapturously, when Cythna ceased.

That was her thanks.

Cythna took a chair near the girl, and looked kindly upon her. "Why don't you come oftener, Selina?"

"Seems I'm very frequent to me, ma'am. I s'pose it's rather late for me to come now, but I've bin marketin', and I brought you a flower."

Cythna took the smutty, dishevelled chrysanthemums with unfeigned gratitude. She valued such gifts.

"Are you learning to play?" she asked, noticing the accordion.

"Not me." Selina got very red. "It belongs to a friend; it's Matt Furth's," she continued after a moment's pause.

Cythna asked no questions concerning the fact of the instrument being in her possession. She probably guessed the reason, but something in the girl's manner made her ask: "How old are you, Selina?"

"Seventeen, as far as I know, ma'am. Granny, she've got a bad mind for dates, that and names, and father, he didn't care,

P'raps my mother might have knowed. I think I'm seventeen 'cause Mrs. Cottage, she says I was born about the year of her Rosa, which is going on eighteen."

Cythna did not explain why she had asked this question, but when the girl had gone she thought about her a little. To her there was something strangely pathetic about Selina; whether it was because of a wistful look she wore now and then, or because she always liked sad pictures and sad stories, and sad music best, whilst the other girls liked gay ones, or because of her sensitiveness to the sufferings of others, Mrs. Mayern could not tell.

As Selina hastened home she saw two men coming towards her, the one thin and slight, the other very tall and strongly built, who walked with a lounging gait, that might well have deceived anybody as to his rate of progress. His companion, at least, did not find it easy to keep up with him. If his size had not told her who he was, his laugh would have done so, or her own heart. It was Matt Furth. She crept into the shadow and slipped

past them. She might have taken that opportunity to give up the accordion, but she did not ; first, because its owner was not alone, and, secondly, because if she did there would be no reason for him to come for it to-morrow. And Selina was a wise girl. She made the most of the few pleasures that came her way.

The men did not notice her. Matt was still laughing — a little uproariously, perhaps — at something the other had been telling him.

Having let them pass, Selina stood and watched them. They looked like one being, her broad-shouldered friend and the lean man just behind him, and then they were swallowed up in darkness.

CHAPTER III.

It is said that no one ever takes to dock labour till he has failed at something, or everything else. This is, however, one of those general statements to which exceptions can be easily found. Matthew Furth was an exception. His mother was left a widow when he was quite a boy, and he would hang about the docks in the hope of getting odd jobs by the means of which he could help her. As he grew older his occupation there became more a matter of course. He had not had much education, and his physical development was in advance of and superior to his other faculties; the sort of labour commended itself to him. Before long, he was a "preferred casual," and thus earned very fair wages. Now he was a "stevedore" in regular work. He might have

risen to be something better, perhaps, but he was not ambitious. He took life very much as it came, and there had never been anything to stimulate him to great effort, or make him desire more for himself. As for his mother, she had been a woman of many sorrows, and the only child left to her in old age was this Matthew, her youngest born. It was sufficient happiness for her to have him with her, and to feel that she had a home, and need not end her days in the dreaded workhouse. Sometimes she reproached herself, sweet and pious as she was, with selfishness.

“I believe I’ve kep’ you from marrying, Matt,” she would say; “but you mustn’t let me. A wife and children to come home to is better for a man than a poor old woman. There’s many temptations kept from him that’s got a good wife and little children depending on him.”

But Matt laughed away her scruples. He was not thirty yet. There was time enough, he said; she was all he wanted. He was very devoted to his mother. Old people and little children always found a friend in him. Per-

perhaps she slept more soundly on Sundays than other days), Selina found herself free to do what she liked. She therefore seated herself by the window to watch the doings of the neighbourhood, and catch the first sign of Matthew's advent.

There was not much to see, and what there was Selina had beheld many a time before, yet it afforded her some interest. A few bedraggled, depressed-looking fowls were wandering aimlessly along as if they were merely out for the sake of taking a constitutional. Selina knew these fowls; they belonged to Mrs. Podson, and they were moulting. One old hen seemed to have nothing but a tail feather to remind her of her vanished plumage. At the doors of some of the houses stood women with the inevitable babies in their arms. A few older children were playing about in the road, but the street enjoyed a temporary immunity from its usual crowded condition, as both church and chapel had claimed the members of their Sunday-schools for the next hour or so.

A couple of men were leaning against the closed door of an engineer's yard opposite to

her, smoking their pipes and talking. One of these men was Mr. Sweetlove, the other was Matt Furth's companion of the previous evening. Selina knew him by sight. He was Dilkes, the casual docker. Low as he had fallen, it was evident that he differed from the men he was forced to make his mates. He once told Matt he had rowed in the University eight. He laughed when he said it, as if he expected to be disbelieved. But it was probably true.

The gentleman who rejoiced in the mellifluous name of Sweetlove lived in the same house as Selina. His first name was James, and he was familiarly spoken of as Brassy Jimmy. Brassy Jimmy he might well be called, but the nickname had arisen among his acquaintances not from any special characteristic of Mr. Sweetlove, albeit his mother had told him, when he was in ragged knickerbockers, that he was the most brazen child she had ever had to deal with. Mr. Sweetlove had been a brass moulder at one period of his career. When he had been discharged, owing to a temporary dulness of

trade, and gone on the road, that is, tramping in search of work, he had apparently come to the conclusion that a man could employ himself better than by working so many hours a day at one thing. His travels, and the society of a mate who had seen life, enlarged Mr. Sweetlove's mind. Perhaps he possessed latent histrionic powers. At any rate, he henceforth played many parts. He no longer sought for work, or only did so ostensibly. But on the whole he flourished, as the wicked have a knack of doing, at any rate for a time. Not that Mr. Sweetlove considered himself anything but a very upright and honourable gentleman. He rather prided himself on his freedom from any vice, except a slight propensity for gambling. He was an enlightened individual too, according to his standard. It was necessary for him to read the papers, and he did so almost as assiduously as Mr. Crapp himself. If he did not feel inclined for this intellectual exertion, he walked over the bridge and obtained the news from that worthy. The subject that was of the greatest interest to Mr. Sweetlove was the state of the labour market, and his sympathies were

very catholic. He had the fellow-feeling which is said to make men wondrous kind, for he belonged to whichever class might be suffering—for the time being. Shipwrecks, too, or colliery explosions, or large fires were not without interest to Mr. Sweetlove—he had been concerned in them all. Sometimes he was so enthusiastic as to tramp miles and miles to plead for the ruined or maimed survivors.

If there were a cotton famine in Manchester, Mr. Sweetlove would uplift his voice in a wailing ditty in the streets of London, and pathetically implore the aid of the rich and prosperous for the poor factory operative who had ~~got~~ no work to do. If there were a dock strike, or a strike among those employed of the sweaters, or indeed among any class of labourers whatsoever, Mr. Sweetlove became a starving victim with a wife and several helpless little ones, some of the latter occasionally accompanying him, and joining feebly in his song, being reconciled (or their parents being reconciled) to the day's outing by a share in the profits of the speculation. If the frost were very severe, Mr.

Sweetlove was a gardener who was frozen out, and who saw no prospect of work in his own neighbourhood while the weather lasted. If there had been a terrible gale, Mr. Sweetlove obtained a sailor's rig-out without much difficulty, and wrung many a tender heart by his desolate and travel-worn appearance, having tramped from the scene of the wreck, being one of the few survivors, and having, unfortunate man, lost all his worldly goods when the *Macdonald* went down. If there had been a colliery explosion, Mr. Sweetlove was skilful in tucking away any superfluous limb, or arranging a bandage on some conspicuous part of his person, and then he was a sufferer who could not fail to appeal to any who were acquainted with the details of the accident.

His stock-in-trade was not extensive. His ordinary costume served for most occasions, and it is an easy matter to vary a fancy dress of rags. For the rest, he had some imagination, a knowledge of the public mind with regard to mendicants, so that those who chiefly benefited him were the people who prided themselves on their discrimination, and any amount

of assurance. In a word, he was "Brassy Jimmy".

The nature of his profession obliged Mr. Sweetlove to go occasionally on tour, so that it was only at intervals that his own neighbourhood was honoured by his presence.

In spite of his many vicissitudes, Brassy Jimmy was still a young man. Perhaps he was thirty, though a rather cadaverous complexion and hollow eyes made him appear both older and more to be pitied than he was. It may be said for Mr. Sweetlove, that neither his ancestry nor his bringing up was favourable to his health, moral or physical. He looked as if he were in consumption, and he probably was, but he was as cheerful an individual in private life, as he was lugubrious in public. Of late, Brassy Jimmy had begun to contemplate matrimony. Returning home, after a somewhat prolonged absence consequent on a labour disturbance in the North of England, he was struck with Selina's appearance. She seemed to have suddenly grown into a young woman. Jimmy had known Selina for six years, and as the acquaintance had begun by his protecting

her from the cruelty of her father, gratitude and habit made her to some extent his friend. She did not, of course, quite understand the nature of Jimmy's profession—except that it took him away from home—but she knew it was not unconnected with begging. He did not inspire her with much respect or admiration, but she liked him. She was at present ignorant of his sentiments towards herself, but was not long to remain so.

During the course of his conversation with Dilkes, Sweetlove looked up, and seeing the girl made a sign to her to come down. Selina shook her head. It was close in the small room, but she did not want Matt to come and find her talking to Brassy Jimmy.

The afternoon waned. The talkers moved away in different directions. They seemed to walk aimlessly, as the fowls had done. The children came trooping home, noisy and hungry. Some vanished indoors to tea, others quarrelled and laughed and played outside. Now and then a young man and a girl came by, their arms round each other's waists, with an artless disregard of publicity.

The dusk fell.

Selina began to feel depressed. Her heart grew heavy, and a longing which she scarcely understood, but which of late had now and then possessed her at the decline of day, made movement necessary. She began to prepare the tea.

The old woman awoke, ate and drank, and went to sleep again.

Selina returned to the window. Matt would come maybe when he had had tea. Perhaps he would take her out for a walk. She fell into day-dreams. Suppose he did. They would go across the bridge together, and watch the still ships with the moonlight on them. They would be very happy—very happy.

It was good to be alone, to sing, to think, to imagine. One was happy then. It was better to be with Mrs. Mayern, who told you such beautiful things. One was happy then. It was best to be with Matt. Everything came right. One felt as if the sun were shining and spring were here, and hunger, and hard words, and cold were gone out of the world. To be with Matt was better than to be alone or

to be with Mrs. Mayern. One was happy *then*.

By-and-by he would be here. She should give him the accordion. He would thank her. He would ask her if she were well, if she were as contented as ever, if there were anything he could do for her. And he would hold her hand in his warm clasp when he went away, and look back and smile at her. . . . Matt had a smile in his eyes at all times. Why did not other people look like that? She could remember no other eyes which had ever looked at her as Matt's did. She thought of all the people she knew or had known.

Her grandmother, her father, Mr. Sweetlove, Mrs. Cottage, Mr. Crapp, Cythna. Ah, yes! Cythna had nice eyes. It seemed as if you must tell her all that was in your heart when she looked at you. But Matthew Furth! . . . when Matt looked at you, you did not think of yourself at all. You thought of him.

How dark it was getting! She was weary of the house. She would go downstairs and creep out of the door into the street. She would see

Matt then when he came, and no one would disturb them now.

Outside it had grown quiet. The fowls were cooped up once more ; men, women and children all seemed to be within doors. She drew her shawl round her, and stood still, waiting.

What a big world it was. The great dark sky stretched and stretched ever so far, away, and away, and away. Was heaven above it ? If so, angels might be looking at her now. It was a long way up. But they could see. It was nice to think they cared about her. To-night she wanted to be cared for. She was lonely.

"I suppose nobody has ever *much* loved me," said Selina to herself ; "mother died, and father was wicked, and granny is old. My cat liked me, but it got poisoned. Mrs. Mayern she seems to take to me, but then she ^{has} ~~got~~ so many. I wonder if it's wicked to wish to be long special, just quite by yourself. They say that God loves every one, and that's a crowd, a tremendous crowd. Just think ; all them people on bank holidays, and more over ! Of course I'm very glad He loves 'em all, *very* glad. But

God's different because He's so great. Say a man now. I sort of fancy I might like one who cared for others, but for no one special, and then suddint he'd see me, and then he'd love me *only*, just me—anyways, love me so much more'n the rest, they wouldn't count. And of course, I'd love him best too. And we'd say to each other : 'Other people's all very well, but you and me, just us two, *we*——'

She paused suddenly. A hand touched her arm. In the dark she blushed hotly as she looked up. Then she grew cold as suddenly.

"Oh," she said ; " it's you."

" Yes, Selina," replied Mr. Sweetlove blandly, " I was just going to take the air. P'raps you'll keep me company."

" No, thank you, Jimmy," Selina answered.

" You'd best. You'll catch cold standin' still. It's a tasty night, too."

" I'm going in directly," replied Selina, wishing he would depart.

" S'lina," said Brassy Jimmy, who apparently had no intention of hurrying away.

He leant against the lintel of the door, and regarded her steadily.

“Yes.”

“See here ; I wish one of these days you’d come out with me. I’ve heerd you sing very sweet, and I believe we could earn a honest coin or two doin’ dooets in the haristocratic neighbourhoods.”

“No, thank you,” Selina answered, “I don’t need to do that sort of work, Jim.”

“No,” said Mr. Sweetlove meditatively, “you don’t p’raps, but it was for the sake of the public I was speakin’, S’lina. You’re a girl with talents. Yes, there’s no mistake ; you’ve ~~got~~ the quality, S’lina, that’s the makin’ of what I may call all artistic perfessions—such as mine. I’ve heard you mimic now, S’lina, capital, and you’ve ~~got~~ imagination. There’s two things goes to make success, experience and imagination. Granted you’ve ~~got~~ the one, there can’t be a honest doubt but I’ve ~~got~~ the other. See !”

“Well,” said Selina coldly.

“Ah, you don’t take my meanin’.” Mr. Sweetlove changed his position so as to gain more support for his person. “Dilkes, he was remarkin’ this afternoon that you have the artistic

temperament. No offence meant, S'lina. We was watching you. Dilkes, he said : ' That little girl has possibilities '. ' What's that,' says I, not twiggin'. ' In all cases where sensibilities is high, you'll see that cast of features,' says he, ' There isn't a actress or a artist, but has, more or less, that brow, and sich a nose.' ”

“ Really ! ” cried Selina, half annoyed, half interested, and by no means altogether understanding.

“ That brow and sich a nose,” repeated Mr. Sweetlove with unction. “ And he went on to remark : ‘ It's a pity she's thrown away on the London slums ’. Them was his words, S'lina, and I echo them. S'lina, it *is* a pity. I want to interdoose you to society. I can see many a opening for you—and yet——” he paused.

The moon had looked from behind a cloud and disclosed Selina's form and face. The latter was turned towards himself, and there was no mistaking its expression of innocent wonder. All of a sudden a thrill of something like shame went through Brassy Jimmy. More, he realised that he would not like to make that use of Selina Pask. Begging was

all very well for him, perhaps, but—unwonted sensations swept over Brassy at the sight of the pretty face under the old shawl.

“—— Dilkes!” he cried. “S’lina, look here; I love yer. I do, S’lina. Marry me, and you shan’t have to work at all. I’ll do it all, and you shall stop at home like a lady. S’lina!”

His voice changed. Such truth as there was in Brassy Jimmy came to the surface at that moment.

Selina was silent. Her wish of a few minutes ago was fulfilled. Some one loved her, and some one who certainly could not be accused of universal tenderness. Her wish was fulfilled indeed; but only in part, and as is often the case in human affairs, the part wanting was the essential one.

“S’lina,” repeated Brassy.

“Oh, I can’t, Jim,” the girl cried, shrinking from him. “I am going to stay with granny.”

“Throw in your granny, child. Why,” he added, his professional instincts asserting themselves, “if there was any case what needed investigation, your old granny’d be a useful bit of furniture.”

Selina did not hear him.

"Don't ever name it again, Jim," she said. "If I marry—I don't know as I shall—but if I do, it must be some one different."

"You despige me, S'lina."

"No, Jim," she said quietly, "but I don't—look up to yer."

"What's the need? I don't want a woman to think me a idol to worship. Be my pal, S'lina, and let reverence be ——"

"I'm your pal now, Jim; I can't never be no-think more. Don't ever allude, Jim. Please don't; else," said Selina, beginning to cry, "granny and me'll have to move."

The difficulties of such a step were obvious, but it was the only threat that Selina could think of.

It alarmed Jimmy. "Don't do that, S'lina," he said. "Well, p'raps you'll change yer mind, you're young yet."

"No," said Selina, "don't think I'm agoin' to change, for it ain't likely."

Mr. Sweetlove walked away dejectedly. Selina's refusal of him seemed to darken the world. But he was not of the nature to stake

all his chances of happiness on a woman, and he bore his rejection with the philosophy which a life of changes and chances had developed.

Selina felt it more. She was always sorry to inflict pain, and besides she liked Mr. Sweetlove ; but still she was rather annoyed with him for disturbing her peace of mind and threatening to upset the pleasant relations which had hitherto existed between them. For the minute she even forgot all about Matt and that she was waiting for him. She was cold, too. She turned dejectedly, and was about to enter the house, when the sound of her own name suddenly thrilled her.

This time it was not Mr. Sweetlove who addressed her.

She stood still, and Matt came up to her. At once she was warm, happy, satisfied.

"I've come for my instrument," said Matt. "I'd nearly forgot it."

"You're very late, Mr. Furth. I expect granny is asleep. I'll bring it down. Do you mind waitin' a minute?" she added shyly.

She was back soon, breathless but smiling. She looked very pretty in the moonlight, with

the shawl about her head from which the untidy curly hair escaped.

"You're a brick," said Matt. "Thank you, Selina, I was a bit short when I put it in. See here, Selina, don't you charge a kermission?"

"No," she said, putting her hands behind her involuntarily, "not to you."

"Well," said Matt, "I'd rather. It seems a shame puttin' on you when that's your line of work. But you and me are old pals, ain't we? I can remember you when you was a little thing not so high as my knee. You used to run arter me, and say, 'Hallo! Mr. Furth,' and laugh, you did; you was always laughing, and gold hair streaming out from you."

She laughed now. She liked to hear Matt talk like that. Matt was feeling to-night that he loved all the world.

She did not know why his voice sounded gentler than usual. She was only glad to hear that it was so. For he was speaking to *her*.

"Aren't you cold out here, Selina?"

She shook her head.

Jimmy had said much the same thing, and

accompanied the remark with a suggestion. Would Matt? They had been out together now and then, when they had chanced to meet. The few pleasures she had known seemed all to have been what Matt had given her—until Cythna came.

“I’d go in if I was you,” said Furth, still with that unwonted something in his voice which thrilled her. “Good-night, Selina.”

“Good-night, Mr. Furth,” after a brief pause, wearily.

He held her hand warmly. His ear detected the tired sound of her voice. His tone was full of sympathy when he said :—

“Are you tired, Selina?”

“No, Mr. Furth. . . . Yes, a little.”

“I’m sorry. I won’t keep you. Good-night, Selina.”

“Good-night.”

He went away.

She listened till she could not hear his footsteps any more. Then she stole back into the house. The old grandmother was awake and querulous. Selina was very patient with her.

She had not had her dream, it was true, but

Matt had been thoughtful for her, had spoken kindly to her. That was something. And, perhaps, who knew? some day ——

She crept to her bed, lay wakeful for a while, still dreaming, then fell into quiet and peaceful sleep.

Matt walked slowly homewards, thinking, not of Selina, but of Mary Dove. He had seen her to-day for the first time.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was at the Millards he had met her. The Millards always sat in the parlour on Sundays. The kitchen did very well for week-days, when John took his meals in his working clothes, and with one eye on the clock, but on Sundays both he and the children wore their best apparel and there were three courses for dinner, and "something extra" for tea. Therefore the parlour was in requisition, the little parlour with its stiff, shiny chairs, on which were slippery antimacassars ; with its highly coloured pictures in the brightest of gilt frames ; with its ugly china ornaments and bunches of wax flowers, protected by glass shades, which were in their turn protected by crochet squares ; with its gilt clock, under which a nude and plump gilt boy was incessantly swinging ; with its square of

carpet, and with its harmonium ready for the evening hymn.

John played the harmonium himself. He had always had a taste for music, and he thought it would be some consolation to have a musical instrument in the house, even if no one could perform upon it. He was a staunch total abstainer, and the money which would have been expended on beer was put aside towards the weekly instalments by which the harmonium was to be paid for. Martha had no time for accomplishments, because she had the housework and the cooking to do, and four children to look after, but John had his evenings. He was a driller,¹ and when he came in from his work was glad to stay at home. When Mrs. Millard was putting the children to bed, he would try to pick out with one finger the music-hall tunes which he had heard in the streets, and on the organs. They did not always sound very well on the harmonium, but they afforded some pleasure to John. Moreover, he aspired to playing waltzes and galops when he had acquired more proficiency, so he plodded on,

¹ One who makes holes for rivets : an engineer.

and Mrs. Millard smiled while she undressed Maggie or rocked Teddy's cradle to hear the spasmodic notes which her lord and master was conjuring from the tortured instrument. Then Cythna Mayern, widowed and bereft of her only child, came to live among these people. She lodged at the Millards, and she brought her beloved piano. She spent all her spare minutes at it, and John, listening from time to time, marvelled. One day he ventured to ask her to look at his "organ," and try it, so that he might have a juster idea of its powers. When he heard the sort of music she played on it, he came to the conclusion that he would no longer be satisfied with "jigs," and must learn something better. By-and-by, Cythna suggested teaching him his notes. So, on specified evenings, when he came in from the yard, he would hurry over his tea, and scrub his hands, and settle himself to the harmonium, with the instruction book before him; and when Cythna heard him begin, she would come down and sit by him, and help him through the difficulties of the way. When he was tired, he was slow, and apologised profusely for his mistakes, and

got very annoyed with his left hand ; but when he had not worked too hard during the day he was a quick pupil, and it was not long before he could play the tunes on Sunday evenings laboriously, yet correctly, while his family uplifted shrill but hearty voices behind the music stool.

It was not time for the hymns yet, however. Preparations for tea were going forward. Mrs. Millard, arrayed in a dress of a very bright blue, and wearing the whitest and starchiest of collars and cuffs imaginable, and the jet brooch which reposed in cotton wool all the week, was wandering between the kitchen and the parlour, and the parlour and the kitchen, with cups and plates, and bread and butter, and seed cake, and a glass dish with water-cress, and another with jam ; and Albert followed whithersoever she went, trotting along with a beatified expression, for the joy of anticipation was strong within him. Mr. Millard sat in the arm-chair, with his feet on the fender and the baby on his lap. The fat hand of the year-old child was clasping a clay pipe. It was a pretence of Millard's that he did not enjoy his smoke unless he had

some one to keep him company, so when he filled his own pipe he generally filled one for the baby. Occasionally Teddy forgot his treasure, and dropped it, with fatal results to the "clay," but it was not an expensive luxury, and the pleasure the father got out of the mild joke quite reconciled him to a breakage now and then. Near the window, trying to read a Sunday school prize by the fading light, sat Maggie, a pretty little girl in a very stiff garment, which spread around her like an opened parasol. Bobby, attired in a velveteen suit made from his mother's wedding dress, and with a wonderful, much-darned lace collar, that had probably once belonged to a rich little boy, was planted on the hearth-rug arranging the contents of the Noah's ark on his father's boots, and sighing plaintively now and then when a movement on the part of his parent or an inequality on the surface of the boot endangered the equilibrium of the elephant, or Ham, or the zebra, the sight of which last always saddened him, because it looked as if it would taste like sweets and didn't.

Mrs. Millard was just making her final journey,

teapot in hand, and Albert's hopes were on the verge of realisation, when there came a knock at the door which caused Mrs. Noah to fall prostrate among her husband's beasts, and precipitated a fowl and a horse of equal magnitude upon the hearth-rug.

"Oh, dad," said Bobby sorrowfully, "you moved."

"Sorry, Bobkin. I expect that's Furth. He always knocks as if he owed the door a grudge. Run and let him in."

But Mrs. Millard had forestalled him.

"Come in, Mr. Furth. You see, I can't offer you but my left hand, and that's unfriendly. We are just goin' to have tea. Now then, Albert. Bless the boy, he's for ever at my apron-strings. Run in, laddie, or I shall scald you. Come in, Mr. Furth. John's at home."

"Hulloa, Millard, you looks all a father, as usual. How's the little 'un?"

"Tidy, thank you, mate. You see, he's beginning to follow my vices."

Furth held out his big hand to the infant, and took possession of its tiny one. Teddy regarded him seriously for a moment, and then

wrinkled up his nose and smiled. Matt looked pleased.

"It's a knowing youngster," he said.

"Mr. Furf," lisped Bobby, "you're treadin' on my pottymouse, and—I can't find Noah neiver."

Matt made profuse apologies, which were cut short by Mrs. Millard pouncing upon her offspring and beginning vigorously to rub his velveteen knickerbockers.

"How often must I tell you, Bob, *not* to sit on that rug when you've got these clothes on! Them white hairs do come off so."

Bobby exhibited less patience at the attention paid to his own person than at the attention paid to the luckless inmates of the ark. He was detained, however, till he had had his glories hidden in a clean pinafore, and then scrambled into the high chair which placed him at a convenient altitude for surveying the contents of the tea-table. Maggie laid aside the story of the little girl whose virtues it seemed an impossible thing to emulate, and also turned her attention to earthly joys. Albert wore an air of serious determination as he regarded

the cake, and John drew up a chair to the table.

"Let me hold the young 'un," said Matt.

"Don't you bother with him, Mr. Furth," said Martha; "I'll see to him directly I've poured out the tea."

"It ain't no bother," said Matt; "I likes the little 'un."

Mrs. Millard looked gratified at the attention her youngest born attracted.

"Oh, mother," implored Maggie, "may Mr. Furth sit along of me? I won't upset nothing on him. And, oh, *mother*," reproachfully, "you've given me milk and water, and it's Sunday; mayn't I have a wee sprin-kle of tea?"

"Dear, dear; what children. You'll be asking for beer for supper next. Pass up your mug."

"I shan't ask for beer, mother," remarked Albert (it may be noted that the eldest boy had been named Albert Edward, and the youngest Edward Albert, for no reason that could be discovered except that the father was said to resemble the Prince of Wales), "I belong to the Phœnix Band. I've been enrolled, haven't I,

father? I'm goin' to march in the percessions, ain't I, father? And we *have* got a swagger banner, jest."

"This is an uncommon good cake, Mrs. Millard," Matt said, helping himself to his third slice. "I always say there isn't a cook like you, anywhere."

"There I'm with you," said Millard, "I fancy it was the wisest act I ever did when I took up with Martha, and so I tell her many's the time."

"That'll do, John," said his wife, smiling at him. "You must bear in mind, Mr. Furth ain't a married man."

"When I come here's the only time I wish I was," said Matt, who knew that all women were not Marthas, and had too thorough a knowledge of the slatternly and gossiping creatures who drove men from, rather than drew them to, their homes.

"Ah," said Mrs. Millard, "wait till you come across the right one, and then you won't want to come here to wish you was married. I wonder if Mrs. Mayern'd fancy a piece of cake with her tea."

"Oh, let me take it, mother," cried Albert instantly, and the other two said: "It's my turn".

"No, it isn't," said Albert; "you took the apple."

"Well, and you carried up the rice-pudding last week."

"That ain't cake."

"Well, no more's apple cake," said Maggie with triumph.

"Mother, mayn't I?"

"Don't quarrel, children. See here, instead of taking one large piece, we'll cut three small pieces, and you shall each carry one."

"Me, too?" asked Bobby.

"Yes, but not all to-day. Maggie shall go to-day."

"I'm the eldest," said Albert.

"Ladies first, you know," said Matt. "I say, Maggie, if Mrs. Mayern ain't engaged p'raps she'd let me step up arter tea. I've got a message from Mrs. Shears, she's worried about Elsie. Just put it, will yer?"

Maggie departed, proud of her errand. She returned very soon, flushed with triumph.

"She was very much 'bliged," she remarked, "and she's given me two chokilates out of a box, and 'yes,' Mr. Furth."

When the tea was cleared away, John went to the harmonium and began to play. The children stood round him, and his wife sat by the fire and rocked Teddy on her knee. Matt was opposite her. He liked to spend an occasional Sunday with the Millards. Their surroundings were better than those to which he was accustomed. The simple home life, the children, the general brightness appealed to him. He was not a highly imaginative man, but the tea, and the warmth, and the light, had made his brain active, and as Millard played, his fancy ran riot. He tried to imagine how it would be if this were his home, and Martha his wife, and the little sleepy child his child, and something seemed to tug at his heart-strings.

John played on, his portly body swaying from side to side.

"Father," said Mrs. Millard, "play 'There is a green hill,' and let Maggie sing it."

Maggie sang.

The childish treble was clear and sweet. The baby was falling asleep. Mrs. Millard was holding one tiny hand against her lips, the infant's head lay on her bosom. Her eyes were full of tenderness as she gazed at the group by the harmonium. Maggie leant against her father as she sang. The boys stood on the other side of him.

“ Oh, dearly, dearly, has He loved,
And we must love Him, too,”

lisped little Maggie. When she ceased Mrs. Millard rose softly, her finger upraised.

“ Baby is asleep,” she said in a whisper.

She went from the room singing in a low voice part of Maggie's hymn.

Every true mother glorifies womanhood. Matt had a vague consciousness that just then the working-man's wife was a holy creature.

He sat staring into the fire while the others went on singing.

“ Won't you sing, too, Mr. Furth ? ” Maggie pleaded.

Matt roused himself with a sigh.

“ I think I'll go up now, and then I must be

off," he said. He remembered his appointment with Selina.

He did not stay long with Mrs. Mayern. She was getting ready for church. But it did him good to see her. Cythna did every one good unconsciously. Her manner, her beauty, her lovely voice, and the sweetness of her sad and sympathetic eyes had an effect on the rough people among whom she, reared in luxury, had chosen to cast her lot. They had faith in her. It was impossible to distrust her. She was just one of themselves, and yet with a difference none of them failed to recognise.

"You are trying to keep to your good intention?" she said at parting, looking at him with her bright smile.

Matt shifted uneasily.

"I'm tryin'," he said, "sometimes it's hard."

"I daresay it is. Still, don't run into temptation."

"A fellow don't like to be always pullin' his mates' faults to pieces," said Matt, who understood her, and wanted an excuse for the way he had spent last evening.

"No," said Cythna, "but if he's sensible, Matt, he'll remember his own, won't he? and then he can keep away from the 'mates' who are likely to make him worse."

"I wish he could find a counter-attraction," thought Cythna, little imagining how soon he was to do so.

They went down together, and Matt let her out.

Then he walked back into the Millards' parlour. "I've just looked in to say good-night," he said, and stopped awkwardly.

During his absence some one had come in and taken his chair. It was a young girl, very little and slender. She was dressed neatly in grey, and looked almost like a lady. As Matt entered she turned towards him, and he saw that her eyes were very soft and brown. They rested for a moment on his face. Her glance thrilled him. He stood where he was, staring at her. He thought he had never seen any one so pretty. Martha looked coarse by her side.

"This is Miss Mary Dove," said the latter, by way of introduction. "She come in to give

a message from Mr. Peckitt. That's our friend, Matt Furth."

Matt came across the room and held out his hand to her. The girl laid hers lightly in it, and Matt found himself staring stupidly at the small gloved thing. He could not remember ever having touched a gloved hand before. The strange, smooth feeling almost made him smile. Thinking over it afterwards, it reminded him of the fluttering softness of his mother's little bird, which had grown tame enough to rest on his rough hand, and let him hold it for a second.

And her name was Mary Dove. It suited her. Mary Dove.

He did not speak to her except to utter some commonplace remark, but he listened while she spoke to Martha. Her voice was low and clear. It seemed as if the others were shouting by contrast.

She did not stay long. She was on her way to church. When she had gone the room seemed dull and empty. John accompanied her outside. Martha seated herself in the arm-chair again.

Was it because she no longer held the baby that the peculiar charm she had had for Matt this evening had vanished? She was a good, kind-faced, affectionate woman, but—she was not Mary Dove.

“ Mary Dove.”

It was only a few minutes since his heart had been in his own keeping. Now this small, soft, insinuating creature had flown straight into it and taken possession. He said to himself: “ I have found my wife ”.

Who was she? he asked Martha, with an evident enthusiasm, so evident that Martha was delighted when he left, because she was consumed with longing to tell her husband she believed Matt was “ hit ”.

She gave the latter what information she could. He learnt that the girl was a niece of Mr. Peckitt's, who had lately come up from the country to stay with him and his wife for a while and be a help to them, that she did dressmaking for a living, and that she was accounted very “ genteel ”. Martha had only seen her once or twice. Did Matt think her pretty?

All the way to Selina Pask's, Matt kept

repeating to himself the words : " I have found my wife, I have found my wife ".

And yet he had never pictured his possible wife as at all like this girl, never imagined any one so small, and dainty, and delicate. But it was just that, of course, which appealed to him. " She's like a child," he said, laughing with pleasure, " and you feel you want to lift her in your arms and take care of her."

It was a genuine case of love at first sight. The thought of the girl he had seen for such a brief time was with him all night. Her presence went with him to his work in the morning. In the evening he made up his mind to call on Peckitt.

" To think," he said, " that I have never cared for one woman more'n another all this time, and now here I am all in a minute ready to make a fool of myself. It's come sudden, like an illness. One can't help it."

Matt spoke the truth when he said he had never cared for one woman more than another. Since his mother's death he had sometimes been lonely. But though there were many girls besides Selina who would have been glad if he

had taken up with them, he had never given one of them a serious thought.

Yet in his way he was romantic. He was capable of enthusiastic admiration of others, and easily led by them.

It was with an understanding of this that Mrs. Mayern had desired for him a counter attraction to the person whom she believed influenced him most.

This was, or had been, Dilkes. He was a man who, often morose when sober, was, when in drink, a delightful companion. He would exert himself to be entertaining to an appreciative listener. He found one in the docker, who had no pursuits beyond his work, who never read anything but his weekly paper, and had a boy's love of story telling without the necessary application or literary discernment to obtain it from books. Dilkes seemed to supply a want. He opened Matt's eyes to many things of which he had been ignorant.

Dilkes had forfeited his right to admiration and respect. And so he was glad to have from Matt Furth, with whom at one time in his life he would have scorned to associate, the only

thing which gave him even a semblance of the position he might have occupied.

The intellectual pleasure was blent with a subtle temptation to Matt, for to the son of a drunkard stimulants were as poison. He had been brought up to abstain from them. But while they drank together the one man forgot that he was fallen, the other how easy it was to fall.

Cythna, who was in and out among the people at all hours, and knew and saw much of which others were ignorant, met him once in a mood that roused her suspicions. She had been very kind to Mrs. Furth; indeed, at the last she had nursed her and been with her constantly, so she had had opportunities of seeing Matt, and he had grown fond of her. She presumed on this to speak to him, and he had been startled by her warning.

It had had a good effect. He felt now that Cythna would rejoice if she saw him married to a good woman who could make his home happy, and he remembered that it had been one of his mother's expressed wishes towards the end.

"My mother would have been proud to see

me bring *her* along," thought Matt, as the image of Mary Dove rose in his mind again. "If she's as sweet as she looks, I'm in luck."

And it was with a cheerful anticipation of pleasant things to come that he set out to call on old Peckitt. He was not one to waste his time when he had something to attain. He acted rather on impulse than reason in most things, and when, as now, an idea had taken possession of him, delay was impossible. He wanted Mary. He must see her again at once.

CHAPTER V.

To Matt's joy the door of the house was opened to him by Mary Dove herself.

He asked for Mr. Peckitt, and the girl prepared to lead the way upstairs to the top storey.

"Do you remember me?" Matt asked, in a flutter of excitement. "I saw you last night at Mrs. Millard's."

Mary had, of course, remembered him quite well. He had the satisfaction of seeing that she recollected his name, for when they reached the rooms that the Peckitts inhabited, she flung open the door, and said :—

"Uncle, here is Mr. Furth".

Mr. Peckitt was sitting in a dilapidated arm-chair with Eliza near him, her head resting on his knee. Eliza was his faithful ally, and they

were never far apart. It would have been well-nigh impossible for him to carry on his work without her. Eliza knew, wise creature, exactly the houses at which her master was expected to rouse the engineers and others in the early morning. If he passed one she insisted on his returning, and if, as sometimes happened, he evinced a tendency to go twice to the same, Eliza would pull him away by the leg of his trouser. Possibly if Peckitt had been asked whether he could best spare his wife or his dog he would have said the former.

Mrs. Peckitt, a fat, untidy, but pleasant-faced woman, was sitting opposite to him.

"You'll excuse me rising, Mr. Furth," she said, "but I'm somewhat troubled with a bellicose vein. Be seated, pray."

"I'm glad you've took me at my word at last," said Peckitt, "and looked in. Many's the time I've asked you ; me and Eliza's glad to welcome you. Aren't we, old 'un ?"

Eliza had certainly stirred at his entrance, raised her head and sniffed a little, then replaced it on her master's knee.

Matt took the only remaining chair, a rather

untrustworthy one. He sat close to Mrs. Peckitt, to be able to see Mary, who was at the side of the table near her uncle, and who now resumed the work on which she had been engaged. She wore a dark stuff dress and a white apron, and in contrast to her aunt looked wonderfully neat and pretty. It struck Matt that she was above her surroundings. Mrs. Peckitt was wont to excuse the shortcomings of her own appearance and that of the room on the ground that Peckitt couldn't see either, "and," she would add, "if that ain't enough to make a woman lose interest, what is I should like to know?"

But what was lacking in the adornment of herself and of the room, Mrs. Peckitt atoned for in her powers of conversation. Indeed, no one ever had much opportunity of "getting in a word edgeways" when she was present. Her garrulousness made her niece appear all the quieter. As the latter sat stitching at some white material, the lamplight falling on her, Matt thought he had never seen any one purer or sweeter. There was a certain gentleness about her in curious contrast with the manner of

most of her class. It gave her an air of dignity to this man who loved her. He thought that Mary was like a lady. He had only known one lady in his life, and that was Cythna Mayern. His inexperience must be his excuse for a great mistake. Mary was not like a lady. She certainly was not like Cythna.

He asked the girl if she knew the latter.

"Not yet," Mary answered, "but I know she lives with the Millards. I've heard her name, and uncle have spoken to her."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Peckitt, "she's what they call a philanderist. But they ain't all so attractive. I can bear in mind one as I knew. That was afore we lived here. She was a fat woman that dressed manly, and had no chignon, and she lived near Stepney way, and held classes and that, and taught us to be socialists. Many a time she looked in to see a young fellow and his wife as lived in the same house as me. She used to ride about on a philosopher, and didn't mind the boys shoutin' nor nothin'. I dessay she did good, but she had too much of a voice to her. She wasn't one as you looked for nor loved."

"Mrs. Mayern ain't that sort," said Matt energetically.

"Ah," began Mr. Peckitt. "There's philanthropists *and* philanthropists. My friend Crapp who reads most things——"

"Bless *me*!" broke in Mrs. Peckitt; "it don't take readin' to see that. Observation shows yer. I'm thankful to say none of them folks has ever come my way much. There ain't nothing special for 'em to stir me up to. But where there is they swarm. I know 'em. That socialist young man to whom I made allusion just back, he got to know 'em, too. 'If there's one person more'n another,' he said (that was just afore I lost sight of him), 'if there's one person more'n another as all wise men had ought to beware of, it's them as go round a-callin' theirselves the workin'-man's friend. There ain't such a thing—leastways the real friends go along quiet, and don't keep on remindin' you of it. Depend on it,' he'd say, 'a perfessional workin'-man's friend gets a income out of it.' He'd had cause to feel bitter, poor young chap, along of some, for he come nigh to starvin' in a strike, and it killed the littlest

child. What about the man as urged 'em to strike, and told 'em it'd be dishonourable to give up? He was a trade delicate and was drawin' a decent salary, he was. Stop the strike and his money come to an end. A parson he called on 'em when the baby was dyin', and made a few of these representations to 'im. I was helpin' to see to the little 'un, the wife bein' too weak to do anythin' but cry, poor thing, and no fire, and I laid them words to my mind, the more when I see that poor young fellow's anger that he'd been made a fool of. Maybe I haven't that respecck for parsons I should have, but I always put 'em in front of them so-called working-men's friends, or as them as likes long names, such as Peckitt insists on calling 'em, philanderists. Ah," concluded Mrs. Peckitt, with unwonted cynicism, "it's seldom a case of givin' when rich folk comes among us. They're usually hopin' to get."

Matt's attention had wandered a little during this tirade. He was looking at Eliza and thinking of Mary. He wanted to draw her into the conversation. He asked her presently if she liked London better than the country.

"Oh," said Mrs. Peckitt in answer, "she likes it well enough ; there's more variety. But I suppose she'll be like the rest of girls, and get married as soon as she've learnt how to support herself comfortable and shove along without the aid of men."

Mary reddened.

"My wife," said Mr. Peckitt, "talks bitter but feels kind ; there ain't a bigger matchmaker nowhere."

"Me !" cried Mrs. Peckitt, with uplifted hands, "why, I advise all the girls I know to keep single."

"Yes ; and all the young men to marry."

Mrs. Peckitt laughed.

"Well, that's fair, ain't it ?"

"Which do you find take the advice best, Mrs. Peckitt ?" asked Matt.

"If you mean which follows it," answered Mrs. Peckitt, "I'd say the men. But the curious thing is, the women agrees with you at the time and the men differs. Then they each act contrary. Now I suppose if I took the liberty of advising you to get married, you'd say like the others of

'em, there was nothing further from your thoughts."

"No, I shouldn't," said Matt boldly.

"Perhaps you're fixed?" ventured Mrs. Peckitt, with a scarcely perceptible anxiety in her tone, for she had not been ignorant of the fact that he had been noticing her niece, and her thoughts had hastened in the direction of what was to her the all-important thing in life.

"Well," said Matt, whose courage had been rather spontaneous than enduring, "I can't exactly say I am."

He was alarmed at himself, and feared he might commit himself in some way. He tried to turn the conversation, and addressed himself to Mr. Peckitt, as being less likely than his wife to lead him on to dangerous ground. The old man had not, like his better half, thought there was anything curious in the fact that the young man had never been to see them till Mary was there also. But it was impossible for Peckitt to say much when his wife was present. He was slow and deliberate in speech; she had a constant unctuous flow of words. Even

when Matt introduced the subject of pawn-broking, *àpropos* of the Wiltshires, who had lately got into trouble, and whom Peckitt knew, because one of his clients lodged with them, she snatched the ball of talk from their hands.

“Depend upon it,” she said, “they’re rich. Grown rich on their evil courses. Pawnbrokin’ and rags and bones is a payin’ thing, I can tell you, Mr. Furth. Why, I once, afore I was married, no, just shortly after—I remember now because I call to mind that our eldest child, John Christopher, poor lamb, that died teething, was buried in the same simmetry—I happened to know, not intimate, but just acquainted, a rag and bone merchant. That’s what he called himself, merchant. He was as rich as anything. When his daughter died, he put up a marble statoo to her. Beautiful it was, marble, and more’n life size, with its arm up. So!” Mrs. Peckitt elevated her arm, but a warning look from Mary reminding her that this attitude was calculated to exhibit certain shortcomings in her bodice, quickly dropped it again. “I went to that simmetry afterwards, to see

my husband's father's tomb and the baby, and I thought I'd go and have a look at it. But I couldn't find it. Not for the life of me I couldn't. Seems the man had sold it for another simmetry. He'd gone in for gambolling, and spekilating, and bettin', and lost his money. It *was* a pity. More'n life size. A female. And with its arm up. Now I come to think of it, it had a sort of face like my niece there—thin-nosed. Except, of course, everything was on a big scale. It's curious Mary should be little. Most of my family is fine, inclined to run to fat. I was a strapping girl. I remember people laughed when I took up with Peckitt, him being so meagre, as you may say. Mary, now, she'll marry some great, big fellow, I expect ; it's usually the way."

Having succeeded in making both the young people thoroughly uncomfortable, Mrs. Peckitt stopped and beamed upon them. Matt could not help liking her. Every one did. But he had wit enough to see that both for his own sake and Mary's the courting could not go on in her presence. He noticed that the girl was fidgeting with her cottons.

"Perhaps she'll be angry with *me*," thought Matt.

He was used to rough chaff and coarse allusions among his mates, and Mrs. Peckitt could not seriously annoy him by her comparatively harmless insinuations, but, he said to himself, it was different with this simple country girl. He was conscious that her aunt jarred upon her. Love made him clear-sighted, sensitive for her. Soon he rose to depart.

"Mary," said Mrs. Peckitt, "will you hold a candle for Mr. Furth? It's dark on them stairs."

"I think I can find my way right enough," Matt answered, but nevertheless his heart leapt at the suggestion, and he felt that after all Mrs. Peckitt was a sensible woman. There was something he wanted to say to Mary, and he rejoiced at this opportunity.

Mary lit the candle and went outside the room with him, closing the door behind her.

"You mustn't come down with me," Matt said. "If you hold the candle so as I can see it will be all right."

"I'd better just come a few steps," the girl replied, "the stairs turn suddenly."

When she stopped she took the candlestick in her left hand and gave him the other. Her touch affected him as the touch of no woman had ever done.

"Miss Dove," he said, "will you walk out with me on Sunday?"

There was a momentary silence. She was hesitating.

"You aren't keeping company with any one else?" Matt inquired eagerly.

"No, Mr. Furth."

And he took this for consent.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, he looked up. She was still standing where he had left her, holding the candle. He smiled at her, said "Good-night" again, and opened the street door.

He walked home in a sort of rapture. The image of her as he had last seen her remained with him. Love made poetry of his thoughts.

When Matt let himself in, and was about to ascend the stairs, a door on the ground floor

opened, and a little girl appeared. Her face was pale, interesting, and serious. It brightened when she saw Furth.

"Why, Elsie," he said, "you ought to be in bed. You look tired to death. And you know you haven't been well."

"I'm not very tired, Mr. Furth," she answered. "I'm waiting for mother to get back. There was a ship come in, and she thought there might be some washing. The time don't seem long. I've been reading."

"You read too much, Elsie," said Matt. "If you get so learned, we shall all be afraid of you."

The girl smiled, and the smile made her look, if possible, more serious than before.

"I must learn, Mr. Furth," she said, adding wistfully, "I want to be a teacher, you know, one earns so much that way."

"If I had the making of the world, Elsie," Matt said, "I wouldn't let women work."

He laid his rough hand on the child's brown hair, and the tired, anæmic-looking little creature flushed a pretty red.

"Poor little thing, so you're going to support the family!"

He thought pityingly of the child. He little thought how, of the two, he would soon stand the more in need of pity. Just now his own happiness and the memory of Mary quickly drove Elsie from his mind.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE morning Selina Pask discovered that the chief part of her daily occupation was gone.

She had tidied up the room and got breakfast ready as usual. When she took the cracked cup full of weak tea to her grandmother's bedside, the latter did not stretch out her skinny hand for it with her customary eagerness. On the contrary, she made no movement at all.

"Asleep, still," said Selina; and she put the tea-pot on the hob, and drank what she had prepared for Mrs. Pask, and ate her usual allowance of bread and dripping, spelling out meanwhile a story Elsie Shears had lent her. A queer sort of friendship existed between the two girls, so unlike in disposition. Selina was older than Elsie, but the latter knew more, and was at one time somewhat inclined to look

down on the poorer girl who had sometimes come to do odd jobs for Mrs. Furth. But after a while she discovered that Selina knew many things of which she was ignorant, and once when she was at home with a headache Selina spent the afternoon with her, treating her to a hokey-pokey, and making her laugh so much that she forgot she was not well. Then they discovered they had a bond of union in their admiration of Matt Furth.

"He's always wonderful kind to me," Elsie had said. "He's afraid I'll be knocked up because I learn so hard."

And after that Selina took pleasure in doing things for Elsie. Any one who even lived in the same house with Matt possessed an interest for her, but one for whom he had an affection was certainly entitled to her consideration.

Presently Selina laid down her book, remembering again the old woman.

"She's pretty fast," she remarked aloud, then went across to have a look at her.

"What's taken her that she don't stir? Granny! Granny!"

And she laid her hand on her grandmother's shoulder, and shook her gently.

She expected the thin, querulous voice to be raised, but there was perfect silence.

Selina bent over and looked at her.

Then the silence grew if anything more profound.

The old woman was dead.

Selina had not loved her very much perhaps, but the poor useless thing had been dependent on her, and the performance of her duty had not been quite without tenderness. Besides death often brings love with it.

"She's dead," said Selina, in a whisper at last. After an interval she repeated the words in a louder voice: "She's dead".

A hysterical desire to laugh was succeeded by a consciousness of dread, and she ran from the room in trembling haste, and stood outside the door, her hands clenched against her breast. But she was still too near that silent form, and changed, terrible face.

She flew down the stairs in blind fear.

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Selina almost fell into the arms—or more accurately the arm, for he appeared to have but one—of a man who was coming up. It was Brassy Jimmy. He had lost his right arm some years ago, fighting for his country. He was starting out to notify this fact to a sympathising public, when a misgiving about the security of certain fastenings had impelled him to return for a moment to the privacy of his chamber.

“Hulloa! what’s the matter? Here, don’t drop, S’lina; lean against me. No, the other side, —— it,” as he found his inability to put his right arm round her waist. He drew her into convenient proximity with his left

Selina tried to speak, but could only gasp. She leant heavily against Brassy, who, though he felt some alarm on her account, had a distinct consciousness of triumph that Miss Pask was depending on him for support. Selina’s independence of action was displeasing to poor Jimmy. He had seen but little of her since her rejection of him, but he had not been able to maintain the attitude of dignified reserve he had at first adopted towards her.

"Has some one been hurtin' of yer? If so, he shall feel my fists," said the warlike possessor of one arm.

As he spoke he recalled the other occasion, now long ago, when Selina had fled to him for protection, and his heart swelled within him.

"It's granny," said Selina in a whisper.

"What's *she* been doin'? Slanging of you, eh? But you don't mind your granny, S'lina," said Brassy, puzzled.

At these words Selina again wanted to laugh. In fact, she did so. But it was a laugh that alarmed Jimmy, and pushing him away, she leant against the shaky banisters, and sobbed, and giggled, and choked.

"Highstrikes!" quoth Brassy aloud, "Selina in highstrikes. Here, come up," and clutching her arm he led her into her room again, still choking and sobbing and giggling all at the same time.

"I can't speak gentle to you, S'lina," said Brassy, as he pushed her into a chair. "It don't do with highstrikes. Here!"

He went towards the water jug evidently

with the intention of seeing what effect its contents would have upon her, took it in his hands and was just preparing to give her a douche, though she was inarticulately assuring him she did not want it, when glancing at the bed, he suddenly paused, and stood open-mouthed, the jug in his hands. Then he drew his lips closer together and emitted a long low whistle.

"Dead as a nail," he remarked. "Poor old 'un. Been a corpse long?"

Selina, who by this time had got a little breath, managed to remark that she did not know.

"Went off in the night, I should say," said Brassy, who had walked to the bedside, and was regarding the remains with a critical eye. "You'll have to shut her mouth, S'lina, and have a crowner's quest. It's old age has killed her, but it's been a precious while about it. The thing is, when they get as old as her they don't give themselves a chance to die. Still, she've done it now. Just found it out?"

Selina nodded, and tried to explain.

"No wonder it gave you a turn, my dear. Well, I'm glad I was handy, S'lina. Do you

think you could get this here arm to rights for me? I'll be a civilian to-day, I think, and stay with yer. I dare say you'll be glad to have me."

Selina was too grateful for his offer to be able to scold him for the deception he had been prepared to practise. She restored to him the use of his arm as fast as her trembling hands were able.

Brassy assumed great airs of responsibility.

"You and me, S'lina, 'll have to be chief mourners, and follow the corpse, you as a close relative and me as a near neighbour and friend of the diseased. Come, cheer up, old woman. I suppose you wouldn't like to be left alone with her, would you? No, well I don't suffer from them scruples. So s'pose you go and fetch that there district nurse with pertruding ivories, and I'll keep guard over the corpse till you come back. We ought to pull down the blind, oughtn't we? Oh, there ain't one. Here, just give me that shawl off of the chair. I'll soon rig it up. That's right."

Selina departed, and Mr. Sweetlove took up his position on a chair by the bedside. At first

he fixed a stern eye on the dead woman, as if afraid she would misbehave herself in some way, but by degrees his regard wavered a little in its steadiness. Mr. Sweetlove's nerves were in a very good condition just then, and he had undertaken his task lightly enough, but when Selina was gone, and the room darkened, he felt somewhat differently about it. He gave up looking at Mrs. Pask, and played tunes on his knees, yet every now and then he was forced to turn and glance at her. The quietness was oppressive. A mouse, encouraged by it, came out and ran across the room. Brassy jumped up in fright, and then, seeing what had disturbed him, tried to laugh, but did not succeed very well. Finally he said, as if in answer to his beating heart, "I ain't one of them callous sort as can do it," and having thus justified himself, stalked across the garret, conscious of an unpleasant creepiness in his spine, and shutting the door behind him, stood waiting in the passage, till he heard the voice of little Mrs. Carritt. Then he returned to his seat by the bedside.

"Thank you, Jimmy," Selina said when she entered. "I'm afraid I've kep' you a long time,

but I couldn't find Mrs. Carritt. She was round with Mrs. Cottage's Billy."

"It's all right," said Jimmy. "I haven't minded it, Selina. What can I do now?"

"If you'd leave word at the parson's, I'd be glad," Selina said.

Jimmy looked uncomfortable. "I don't know as I think ——" began he, hesitatingly.

He was not anxious to bring himself prominently before the notice of that gentleman.

"Would you like me to write a line?" asked Selina, who had heard Cythna say this on one occasion.

Jimmy thought it might be as well. He said he was not handy at messages.

Selina had made her offer, but on investigation found there were no writing materials in the house. Jimmy remembered he had some cards. He used them occasionally for professional purposes. He retired to his room, and looked them over. There was one with BLIND on it, another with PARILISED, and, in small letters, FROM AN EXPLOSION. Ah, here was a blank one. He took it, and a thick pen, to Selina.

Now that her powers were called into action, and the effects of the shock had in some measure worn off, she was equal to the occasion. Selina's education had been very rudimentary, and she had never taken kindly to writing, but she was too proud to ask Jimmy to assist her. She had to appeal to him once or twice in the spelling, but then it was too much to expect her to know everything, especially words like "diseased" and "inquich," which were only used now and then in a lifetime.

Jimmy looked at the card he was to deliver.

"deer sir," it ran, "granny diseased in the nite she was gone this mornin when i took er tea is a inquich necesery so a frend tell me your respeckful

"s Pask."

"That'll do," he said.

Jimmy happened to meet the parson. He had seen that gentleman before this morning, and, of course, knew him well by sight. The parson, owing to his having met a one-armed man before, and a man with the full complement of brachial appendages now, could hardly be expected to recognise them as the same indi-

vidual, even if he had paid much attention to Brassy as he passed. Ordinarily Mr. Sweetlove took care that he and the reverend gentleman should not often see each other, a state of things made easier by the frequent absences of James from the parish.

Jimmy debated whether he should give him the note he held in his hand, or go on to the vicarage. After a brief hesitation, he concluded it was a pity Selina should have had the trouble of writing for nothing at all, and so passed on.

"Is the vicar in?" he asked the maid-servant.

"No."

"Ah," said Brassy, "it's a pity. I should like to have seen him myself. P'raps you'll give him this."

"I don't see there's much sense in me goin' back at the present," said he. "I can't do anything for S'lina just now. I'll go over and have a word or two with Crapp. P'raps there's some noos goin' forward."

In due course Mrs. Pask was buried. Brassy appeared as a mourner, looking highly respect-

able, and with a handkerchief whose border was an inch deep. He displayed this handkerchief to much advantage.

After the funeral he apparently had a reaction in his spirits, for he suggested that he and Selina should go off for the afternoon and enjoy themselves. His offer having been rejected by Miss Pask, he told her she was very ungrateful for the interest he had taken in and all he had done for her, even to ordering the coffin, and departed with great dignity, leaving Selina at the door of her lonely room with a heavy heart.

The girl turned the handle and went in hesitatingly. She feared the solitariness of it all. What, then, was her surprise and delight when she saw some one sitting by the window, from which the shawl was removed, and recognised Mrs. Mayern.

"Oh, ma'am," began poor Selina, and burst into tears.

It was Cythna who had given Selina the black dress she wore, and which, it must be confessed, had filled the mourner with secret pride and gratification when she put it on, because it

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was well made and no one had worn it before. The dress and the black straw hat lent her for the occasion by Elsie, who had had it when her father died, and kept it, as she always kept her things, tidy, and the fact that even her boots were neat, made Selina look nicer than she usually did.

"I thought it would be dull for you when you came home, Selina," Cythna said, holding her hand. "I expected you'd come straight back, so I waited."

Selina tried to say it was very good of her, but only sobbed.

"I shall be all alone. I wish I hadn't told her once she was as cross as two sticks."

"Oh, you were very good to her, Selina."

"I s'pose," said Selina, "if one always kept thinkin' they'll die some day, one wouldn't never be erritable with people. It must have been dull lyin' there day after day. I dessay she did feel worritted times. Still," concluded she more brightly, "I generally gave her the fleshiest bits when we had meat, and I've kep' the room tidy—lately."

"Yes," said Cythna, glancing round, "it

looks quite clean, Selina. Shall we have the window open? It seems a little close."

"Granny wasn't fond of open winders," said Selina, "she felt the chill in bed. I thought I'd leave things as they were till she'd gone. It didn't seem nice to be in sich a hurry. But I can do what I please now all the time," continued Miss Pask, who was by no means blind to the fact that her cloud had a silver lining.

"Do you mean to live on here, then?" Cythna asked.

"I s'pose so," said Selina, "it's my home. I've been here most of the time, and I must live somewhere."

"I've been thinking about that," said Cythna, "and wondering if you wouldn't like a change. Of course while Mrs. Pask was alive you had to look after her and manage other things as best you could, but don't you think now you ought to find some regular work to do? You see the parish helped your grandmother because she was old and helpless, but they can't help you."

"Oh, I can git along without them," said Selina with spirit. "There's the Saturday

work, and the bits of helpin' I do for folks, and it doesn't take much to feed *me*."

Cythna smiled.

"That's all very well, Selina, but you'll get older. What do you mean to do then?"

"The same, ma'am. If I can git along at one time, I can at another. It mayn't be for always."

"Perhaps," Cythna hazarded, "you're thinking of getting married. But I hope not; you're scarcely grown up yet, Selina."

"Oh," said Selina promptly, "Rosie Wood, her with the red hair, is younger than me, and she's got a husband and two babies."

"Then," said Cythna, feeling that her little friend was inclined to be confidential, "there is somebody waiting for you, perhaps?"

Selina began making lines on the floor with her boots.

"There's one want me," she said, "but I've said 'No' to him, and I mean to stick to it, and——" she paused, looking up sideways at Cythna.

"And there's somebody you wouldn't say 'No' to, as well?"

Selina nodded.

"I'd tell *you*," she said softly, "not no one else."

Cythna looked at her with her great shining eyes. Her own love story had been brief in the telling, but sweet enough to leave her ineffably tender towards all lovers, even towards such as Selina Pask, who perhaps could scarcely have understood the language in which the hearts of Cythna Mayern and her husband had spoken to each other.

But Selina's love was as pure as herself. There was something about the girl, which, despite her surroundings, her pursuits, and her bringing up, removed her from vulgarity. Perhaps it needed Cythna's intuition to recognise just that which made Selina different from the other girls with whom she had to do. There was an inherent generosity and nobleness in her, a power to appreciate things which only a pure mind could appreciate, which made Mrs. Mayern feel Selina was worth taking trouble about.

"Mind you," said Selina, "he haven't asked me nor nothing, but he's always that good to

me ; and I've cared for him since I was quite little, so as I couldn't think of takin' on with no one else. He's better'n me, I know, but I can't help hoping that it'll be one day. Sometimes I dream what a home would be like with him comin' in of an evenin', the room all tidied ready, the fire burnin' bright, and the tea laid out all comfortable."

"But you haven't told me yet who he is."

Selina did not seem in a hurry to do so. But all of a sudden she burst out :—

"It's Matt Furth, mum. It's him. Every one likes Matt, but I don't believe any one cares for him as I do."

Cythna made no answer for a moment, and Selina said :—

"You ain't pleased at me".

"I should be pleased, dear," said Cythna, "at anything that gave you happiness, but ——"

She paused. It was always difficult for her to speak words that might wound.

Selina drew herself quickly out of Cythna's clasp.

"Do you mean as he wouldn't?" she cried.

“Or——” and then a sudden fear took possession of her, because she saw the pity in Mrs. Mayern’s face.

“Do you think,” she added in a whisper, “he mayn’t—care for—me?”

“No one could help caring for you, Selina. But I want you to be sure he cares for you—best of all.”

A chill struck the girl’s heart, a sense of coming desolation. There was a pitiful drooping of her underlip like that of a child who wants to cry and tries not to. She turned away from Mrs. Mayern. When she next spoke it was of something else.

Two days afterwards she met Matt and Mary together. He did not notice Selina, who hurried past them. But in a moment she had received a vivid impression of Matt’s beaming face and of the pretty girl by his side.

She understood.

The next morning Selina called on Cythna. She had put off her black attire as only suitable for Sundays and grand occasions, and was dressed as she had been before her grandmother’s death. She looked very pale, and

there were red rims round her eyes. She had slept badly and been crying.

"I've come to say," she began shyly, "as I want you to forget what I telled you yesterday." Her eyes filled with tears. "I can't leave off lovin' him all at once, because it's got in me like. Still," she concluded, "I'm goin' to try and not begrudge her. How long have they been keepin' company?"

"Not long, I believe."

"I'm glad of that. I shouldn't like to feel I'd been makin' too much of the thought of him while he was carin' for her. Do people get over this feelin' in 'em that they're achin' round their heart? I don't think I could bear it, not if it went on very long, say till I was as old as granny."

"You won't always be sad, Selina," said Cythna tenderly. "Come and see me whenever you can. It will be a little change for you, and I shall always be so pleased to see you."

Selina's eyes thanked her. She had got past speaking again. As she moved away from the fireplace, meaning to depart, her

glance fell upon a photograph in a beautiful frame which stood on a small table. She knew whose it was. It was that of Cythna's husband. For the first time she realised something of what Mrs. Mayern had suffered. Her own sorrow was already developing her womanhood.

With a pretty involuntary action she caught Cythna's hand and kissed it.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE the man to whom poor Selina had given her heart was becoming daily more infatuated with the girl whose personality had taken such possession of him. There was that about her which had the power to turn men's heads. It is a subtle something to be found in certain women in all ranks of life, and not in any way dependent on position, or education, or intellect. Other women fail to understand the charm, wonder wherein the fascination lies, but it is there to baffle them. It does not usually belong to very good or great women. Mary Dove had no remarkable qualities, but she knew she was attractive. Though she had lived all her life in a country village, she had not remained ignorant of her value. Perhaps the

consciousness of it gave her a certain dignity. It did not surprise her that Matt Furth should fall in love with her. He was not the first who had done so.

But his manner of loving was a new experience to her. It was no lazy, blundering affection, such as others had offered her, such as superficial observers might have expected Matt to give. It was the bursting out of a strong man's passionate love, which forced its way towards its goal,—as a great torrent which cannot be restrained.

This love elevated the man, brought out all that was best in his rough nature, though there was in it at times a fierceness and violence that almost alarmed its object. It was partly his vehemence and the power of his strong will that made her promise, before many weeks had passed, to be his wife. She was not in love with him. Perhaps it was scarcely possible for a girl so cold and self-contained to reciprocate Matt's feeling in anything like its own degree, but at first she liked and was proud of him. She cared for no one else, and if Matt were only a docker, yet he was certainly handsome and

popular, and she was quick to see that other girls envied her. Only, as time went on, though he dominated her, he roused her obstinacy. She did what he wanted, and was angry with him for making her. She grew colder in proportion as he grew ardent, and yet she liked him just too much to let him go. So the weeks and months went on, and they talked of marriage, and Matt began to look about for new and prettier things for the rooms in which he and his mother had lived. To his mind nothing was good enough for Mary, but he would give her the best he could. He grudged every penny he spent upon himself. He was very steady. He sometimes deprived himself of the pleasure of seeing her to do extra work and earn a little wherewith to buy her some small present. He was sufficiently rewarded by a word of thanks in her soft, clear voice. She never reproached him if he stayed away from her. His society was not a necessity to her. But Matt did not notice this. He called her coldness purity, her want of enthusiasm gentleness. Or rather, he did not analyse her ; he had for her the blind worship of a fanatic. Her

place in his life was disproportionate to other factors.

Things were in this state when there came into the case, as usually happens sooner or later, the third person. If there had not been perfect harmony, there had hitherto not been actual discord, and perhaps no one but Mary guessed there was any likelihood that the discordant element would come in. Yet there must be that danger when a woman not in love is engaged to a man who loves her violently. She is too likely to welcome distraction with gladness. Still, this girl, if not what Matt imagined her to be, was by no means unprincipled. She was, in her way, a good girl; she had certainly no deliberate intention of being disloyal to her lover, and when temptation came it was not of her seeking.

Besides their Sunday meeting, Matt often went to the Peckitts one or more evenings in the week. One afternoon, being home somewhat earlier than usual, he thought he would see if Mary would come for a walk. Mrs. Peckitt, however, monopolised him. She had evidently been out, for she was wearing a bonnet, a weird

production of ancient standing, and a ragged boa, by no means in keeping with the season, was flung round her shoulders.

"Ah, my dear," she said to Matt, "you may well look surprised. It's seldom indeed I go out, but sometimes occasions call. I've been to the funeral of a sincere friend, who died sudden. He was a good man, very fat. They could hardly get his corpse out of the door, and he sold the best pickled onions I ever tasted."

Matt expressed sympathy. Being a fortunate lover, he was willing to manifest interest in the affairs of Mary's aunt, a state of things of which Mrs. Peckitt took full advantage, and gave him the benefit of her conversational powers.

"His wife!" went on Mrs. Peckitt, "you might almost take her for a lady. Something Mary's style, or used to be. It was a cutting sight to see her a widow. She had handsome weeds, first-hand, too, and a bordered handkerchief. I shall never taste pickled onions again without thinking of him. It was a new illness he died of. I forget the name, but I could tell you the symptoms. The widow explained 'em all to me."

“You might spare us that, auntie,” said Mary.

Mrs. Peckitt sighed, and gave her head a melancholy shake.

“Mary don’t take that interest in people you do, Matt,” she said in a lower voice. “But never mind, I’ll tell you the whole paragraph. Wait till by-and-by, when Sam comes in, and can talk to her. Why, I declare, I never told you about Sam. The funeral put it out of my head.”

“Who’s Sam?” Matt asked.

‘Who’s Sam?’ repeated Mrs. Peckitt, laughing. “Who should Sam be but Sam? Sam Peckitt, of course. Why, I don’t suppose we’ve ever spoke to him of Sam. have we, Mary? It’s my son that was abroad. He come back sudden, and dropped in on Monday. He walked in as cool as you please, just as if it wasn’t two years since we see’d him—least, since I had. Peckitt, poor dear, can’t be rightly said to have seen him for more. ‘Mother,’ he says, and I cried, ‘It ain’t never Sam,’ and his father sort of gropes with his hands, and says : ‘It’s Sam. It’s the voice of him. Sam!’ he

calls out. You might have knocked me down with a feather."

Matt remembered now having heard that the Peckitts had a son, but he had not taken much interest in the Peckitts themselves till the advent of Mary, and had certainly not concerned himself with any conjectures as to absent members of the family.

"I don't mind telling *you*," said Mrs. Peckitt now, as if in justification of their silence concerning him, "that he haven't been that comfort to us we might have looked for in an only son, and his father afflicted. But he was all for himself. Perhaps we spoilt him when he was little. And the Bible itself says: 'Train up a child, and away he will go'. Yes, that's why we never talked partiklar much about him. It used to make us sad to feel he hadn't no gratitood. Still, a son's a son, and you can't give over loving of 'em. When he turned up the other day suddent I couldn't but feel joyful. And maybe he'll settle after all. His father was saying there's a rush of work at one of the engineering firms near by, and if he'd go in for a spell he might likely turn to it altogether.

He ain't strong, Sam ain't, and ought ter live steady. Delicate here," and she tapped her capacious bosom significantly, and looked at Matt with a melancholy gaze. "I've always fancied there's a weakness with mine, for I palpitate so easy, but I ain't been investigated, so I can't say ; but Sam was telling me that when he was in the topical regions he had a fever, and the doctor said his heart—— Hush, there he is."

The object of their conversation now entered. He was a young man, with a weak, handsome, clever face. He looked almost effeminate beside Matt, but that he had the advantage in intelligence any physiognomist would have quickly perceived. Matt was not a physiognomist, but he knew the faces that prepossessed him ; he felt an instinctive dislike to Sam Peckitt, and a distrust which was foreign to his usually frank and confiding nature. As the evening went on, he felt this dislike growing. There were two things he was disposed to resent in him. One was that he appeared to ape the gentleman, and the other was the way in which he appropriated Mary, directed his

conversation to her, and succeeded in retaining her attention. Still, jealousy played no part in his feeling towards the man. He was Mary's affianced husband, and they were soon to be married, and he believed in her and trusted her.

Sam Peckitt had been round the world as a ship's carpenter with a certain lord of an enterprising nature. He was a man who had tried many trades, and tired of them one after the other. This last venture might have been the making of him if he had not incurred his lordship's displeasure for some misdemeanour, and been discharged.

Sam had never been in the habit of writing to his parents, but when he found himself at the docks, he thought he would see if they were in the old place. There he found them, and, what was more satisfactory, he found a very pretty cousin, of whose existence he had been only vaguely aware, domiciled with them. He determined to prolong his visit beyond a mere call, and being able to be accommodated at some slight inconvenience to the old people, which did not disturb his equanimity, he an-

nounced his intention of looking round till he found something to do.

During tea, the consumption of which temporarily diverted Mrs. Peckitt's mind, for she had an appetite not altogether unequal to her conversational powers, and on occasion capable of eclipsing them, Sam was the object of general attention. He inherited his mother's garrulousness, but in him it was relieved from being tedious by some education and a not inconsiderable experience, and when these failed him, he made demands upon a somewhat lively imagination. Even Matt found himself interested, as it were, against his will. Mary was not talkative, but to-day she seemed more so than usual. Perhaps it was because Sam drew her out. Matt never made great demands on the slight conversational powers which she possessed ; he was intellectually her inferior, perhaps. At any rate, it was not necessary for him to talk much to Mary. It was a sufficient satisfaction to him that her presence was with him. Her present animation surprised him a little, but the new light and brightness it gave to her face made him all the prouder of her.

It was certainly no blame to Sam that he monopolised Mary after tea, for Mrs. Peckitt, having by no means exhaustively discussed the events of the afternoon, insisted on Matt sitting by her, at some little distance from the others, so that Mary might not overhear the details.

"Which after all," said Mrs. Peckitt, "might interest us, but Mary never, as you see, favours talks about diseases. They sort of go against the grain with her. Young girls have these fancies. But they outgrow 'em. You needn't fear," she added reassuringly, as Matt cast a wistful glance towards the window where Mary was standing looking out, with Sam beside her, "you needn't fear she'll think you're neglecting of her. Sam can be wonderful entertaining when he chooses, and a bit of company's a change for her."

The return of Mr. Peckitt fortunately released him, and he was able to have half an hour with Mary before his departure. Nevertheless, when he left, he felt vaguely that the evening had not been as successful or as happy as usual. He could only attribute it to the presence of the

strange element, Sam Peckitt, and was conscious of an uneasiness he could not well define.

He would have been still more uneasy could he have been present at a meeting of a convivial nature which took place at a certain public-house some weeks after. This meeting was held for the purpose of spending the accumulated "footings" paid by an apprentice, a few new arrivals, of whom Sam Peckitt was one, and a workman who had recently been married, all connected with a neighbouring engineering shop. The proceedings began by a liberal supply of beer, and drinking of the healths of those gentlemen present who had contributed to the festivity (which caused a vast amount of cheering), and a few amateur speeches, delivered with much stumbling. Then followed a display of talent. Songs were sung, sentimental or rowdy, as the taste and knowledge of each singer—derived from halfpenny sheets of songs—suggested; these were interspersed with recitations of a thrilling nature.

This stage of the entertainment having terminated, some of the steadier men left, but

the others had "whips round" among themselves, and there was talking and smoking. Now the men began to get somewhat quarrelsome. Some one told a story that was too long, and another drank more than his share and was ejected. Finally there remained only three or four men, among whom were the bridegroom and Sam Peckitt.

The talk ran on marriage, and one of the men told of the reception accorded to him when, after a few days' holiday from the shop, consequent upon his wedding, he had returned to work. It was determined to give him a ringing-in. Along the road that he would have to pass were placed boys, whose duty it was to warn those in the shop. These, taking their hammers, made a violent noise on boilers, or any bits of iron which came handy. This was imitated by all the other men, and as there was no lack of material, and the ringers were in number several hundred, the sound could be heard afar off, and the recipient of the ovation stood in danger of being deafened.

"By jove!" said Peckitt, who was excited by the amount he had taken, and inclined to let his

tongue run away with him ; “ I shouldn’t mind if the fellows do that for me ”.

“ Are you thinking of getting spliced ? ” the man asked, leering at him.

“ I am, sir,” said Peckitt, bringing his hand down violently on the table. “ At any rate, I mean to have a d——d good try.”

For by this time Sam had unfortunately fallen in love, after his own fashion of loving, with his cousin Mary.

It was almost inevitable, seeing that, when he found work, he had taken a room in the same house in which his parents lived, and was able to see the girl nearly every day.

Sam was not troubled by any scruples of honour. From his boyhood he had done what he liked, and he often liked things which injured himself and others. That did not stand in the way of his trying to procure them. He had gone abroad partly because he had got into trouble in England, and he returned to England because he had got into trouble abroad. He had the vices of many a so-called gentleman who models his behaviour on that of a certain

Byronic hero. Above all, he had a hankering for forbidden fruit.

"If I'd come back a bit sooner," he said to himself, "I could have made her care for me easy enough. Girls always do. Here she was, and I should have had heaps of opportunities. Now that fellow's sneaked in and got her first. What a fool I have been."

It was this belief that he was only just too late that galled and fretted him, and made him more than ever anxious to cut out Matt Furth. If he had believed that she was not in love with Matt, he would not have minded so much nor desired her so much, but he could not bear to take a second place with any woman, especially with this. He feared that Mary was contented and happy, and that her plans for the future were quite definite.

A good man would have realised that under these circumstances it was best to leave the girl alone, but Sam was not a good man, and he was rather fond of the danger that is attendant on playing with edged tools, as calculated to give zest to the game of life. He was clever, too, and he did not consider that his life gave him scope

for his abilities. He often wished he had been born in a higher sphere, and had to fill a better position. As he was only a working man, he revenged himself on those that he envied by attacking them whenever he had the chance in conversation, and by professing socialistic doctrines of an iconoclastic nature.

Just as Mary was called ladylike, so by any but a gentleman Sam might almost have been mistaken for a gentleman when he appeared in his best. Perhaps a tailor would have recognised the fact that the elegant grey suit worn by the young mechanic would not keep its shape very long, and his tie was not altogether irreproachable in taste. Still, he looked very well, and he knew it. One Sunday he walked with Mary to the Millards, where she was to meet Matt. One or two ragged boys, whose education in manners had been defective, made comments on his grandeur in derisive terms, such as they would have employed to a west-end swell. Mrs. Pumfleet, standing in conversation with a neighbour, remarked in an audible voice: "I should think he's extra, shouldn't you?" which doubtless implied an exalted opinion of

Mr. Peckitt's social position ; and two of the young Shears, who were playing in the gutter, put their fingers in their mouths and stared at him abashed, much as they did when the parson came or the doctor. Mr. Peckitt was not insensible to the impression he created, any more than he was to his personal charms. He was glad when other people recognised his merits, and perhaps slightly contemptuous of them for doing so.

But notice of the kind Sam attracted was, as he was aware, not without its effect on Mary. Matt's indifference to externals often annoyed her pride. She was sensitive to matters which Selina Pask would not even have noticed, for she thought a great deal of appearances. Sam, in his wanderings and in his intercourse with his social superiors, had acquired a superficial polish which appealed to her. She liked his society.

Still, she did not realise that he cared for her in the way he did, or perhaps she would not have treated him with the frank kindness she invariably manifested. She accepted little attentions from him because he was her cousin, that she would not have felt justified in accepting from a

stranger. Certainly, she was not ignorant of the fact that he admired her. But that did not lower her estimate of him.

If she had seen to what her carelessness would lead she would doubtless have been more circumspect, but whether in slums or in palaces, it is usually trivial actions, the following of impulse rather than principle, that leads to portentous results, to tragedies, to wars. The immediate cause, men say, is such and such a thing, and no one looks beyond to the cause of the cause, the little words, the careless thoughts of every day, which seemed scarcely worth considering, certainly not worth the chronicling.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was an interval in the mothers' meeting during which the women drank tea. Mrs. Mayern conducted the meeting, and provided tea and a liberal allowance of cake, so that the Monday afternoon usually saw a good many women, and an almost equal number of babies, assembled in the Mission Hall. Cythna generally read for a while, but the babies were not always in favour of this. After a certain time one or other of them would strike for shorter hours. Sufficient was it for a leader to be found. There were only too many ready to follow his or her example, and there would be violent kicking of small legs and uplifting of lusty voices in protest. This afternoon the babies were very vehement in their demands. It was well

on in the summer, and consequently the atmosphere, in spite of all attempts at ventilation, was most oppressive. To Mrs. Mayern it was almost unbearable, and she felt quite grateful when Samuel Gripper, aged nine months, sent forth a series of yells which no amount of soothing by his mother, nor worried looks from the older women of the meeting, could quell.

Samuel Gripper was determined to drown Cythna's voice, and before long he was followed in the attempt by Thomas Cottage, his junior by a few weeks, and then with laudable emulation by Emilia Violet Jenkins, who was only just short-coated. Emilia, like most women in time of revolution, was almost fanatical. Her earnestness roused many to follow her. Cythna closed the book and bade the mission woman see about tea.

There was an immediate putting away of work and a bustling and movement among the women. The babies, having achieved their end, became more reasonable, and the temporary lull was favourable to conversation.

"How's Elsie?" asked Mrs. Bloys of Mrs. Shears. "I was so sorry to hear she was ill."

"Well, she's but poorly, my dear," answered Mrs. Shears, a pretty, faded woman, whose wrinkled hands revealed her profession of washerwoman. "If I hadn't been made to, because it worries her to think I was kep' away so many weeks, I'd hardly ought to have come to this meeting."

"She's been queer all the summer, ain't she?" asked Mrs. Cottage. "Rosa told me she hadn't been at the schools."

"Yes, poor little dear. She feels the heat so bad. Always did, and now it's worse. Mrs. Mayern's goin' to try and get her away, but Elsie's such a one for home, I doubt if she'll go."

"What is it exactly, my dear?" asked Mrs. Gripper, with the usual anxiety to know all details of an illness. "A sort of nervous ability, I heard."

Mrs. Shears reddened.

"It is that partly," she said. "But she's been stoopin' too much over her books, and

and worn herself out before childhood was past.
She failed rapidly.

The day of her death was memorable to many
in her small circle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE August bank holiday is only second in importance to Easter, which, as is well known, is prepared for from the beginning of the new year; in fact, as soon as Christmas is over. Multitudes betake themselves to all the open spaces near London. Greenwich Park is high in favour to those within easy reach of it. Those who wish to profit by the holiday spirit, and who desire to reap therefrom a pecuniary advantage, go early in the same direction. There is sure to be riding (of a kind) on the heath, so that studs of donkeys are in readiness, and broken-down cab-horses are called into requisition. Niggers in wondrous striped garments, musicians of various sorts and various degrees of skill, solo players and bands, are to be found eager to display their talents. The

band has the best of it probably, for as the day grows cooler there will be dancing, and at the end of each dance every gentleman who has availed himself of the services of the musicians will pay his penny duly and ungrudgingly. In the matter of dancing, the soldiers from Woolwich have an advantage as far as popularity is concerned over the civilians, but the latter bear this with a good grace. They know and make allowances for the attraction of novelty to the feminine heart, and they are well aware that their star will be in the ascendant before very long. The soldiers have not as much in their pockets as they, and there are other charms in a bank holiday than mere dancing.

It had been suggested by the Millards that Matthew Furth and his sweetheart should make two of a party with themselves and the children. Sam Peckitt was also invited, and accordingly they and others had gone together.

Matt and his friends did not have much to do with the more rowdy of the holiday makers. Matt was inclined to join in the dancing, a form of amusement that appealed to him very

strongly, but he could not get Mary for his partner. She wished to preserve the neatness and coolness of her appearance, and not to have her pretty white dress torn, as it probably would have been if she had yielded to Matt's entreaties to have a turn. As he had already shown her the pictures at Greenwich and the observatory, and devoted himself to her, and as she said she would like to sit for a while with Mrs. Millard and the children, who were resting on the grass, he left her, and having found Polly Crapp (a niece of the sweetstuff vendor) in want of a partner, he waltzed with her to his heart's content. Polly danced very well, and being flattered by the attention of Matt Furth, she exerted herself to be amiable. Other women were nothing to Matt now, but he was very contented, and, exhilarated by the motion and the music, he stayed longer than he had intended. He hoped, as he hastened off to find her, that Mary would not think he had forgotten her.

When he arrived at the place where he had left her, he found Mrs. Millard and the children, but no Mary.

"She went for a little walk round with Mr. Peckitt," said Mrs. Millard. "They'll be back again directly, I think."

"Oh!" was all Matt said, and being rather hot and tired, he sat down to wait for her. He was a little annoyed, why he did not exactly know ; perhaps with himself for having stayed away, perhaps with Mary for deserting him, perhaps with Peckitt for appropriating his sweetheart. But he forgot it very soon, for a man came by with jolly noses, and he immediately laid out his remaining coppers to the joy of the boys, who put on their disguises with the greatest glee, and shrieked with laughter at Matt, who donned a long red proboscis, which by no means improved his personal appearance. He was still wearing it when Mary reappeared. Some girls would have laughed as merrily as the little Millards, but Mary felt and perhaps looked rather disgusted.

"Take it off, Matt," she said, "I can't bear it."

Matt obeyed her, and threw the nose at little Teddy, whose delight in the possession of the new treasure was unbounded.

"I'm sorry I left you so long," said Matt to Mary.

"Oh, it didn't matter," said Mary. But she spoke, for her, somewhat irritably, and Matt, who was deeply sensitive where she was concerned, felt wounded. He did not know why Mary was annoyed. It was at something Peckitt had been saying.

The latter left them and wandered off by himself. Finding certain others of the party, he joined them, and shared in their amusements with a sort of fierce hilarity. He had been trying to instil poison into Mary's mind, making insinuations about Matt, but his remarks had been received with a spirit that surprised him, and he was galled by a sense of impotence. He was beginning to wonder if the conquest of Mary would be as easy as he had expected.

It had been arranged that the party should return at an early hour to the Millards. Matt wished to go to his room to fetch his accordion. The other two walked on with him, while Mrs. Millard went in with the children. Sam never spoke to Mary on his way there, but confined

his conversation to Matt. The latter, who had once more the consciousness that he was in his ladylove's good graces, and who was in a holiday humour, and prepared to be pleased with everything and every one, liked Peckitt better than he had ever done. It was the last time they spoke as friends, and the elder man never cared afterwards to dwell on that summer evening, but at the time it was pleasant to him, and he felt drawn to Sam in a way that seemed almost strange to himself.

Matt was bounding upstairs, when the door of the Shears' room was opened, and Selina came out, and closed it behind her.

"Mr. Furth," she said.

He stopped and looked over at her.

"Elsie's dying," Selina said quietly. "She has been asking for you."

Matt grew grave directly. He came down the stairs as softly as he could. He had always liked little Elsie, and the presence of death strikes awe to lighter hearts than his.

"The little ones is in your room," said Selina. "Mrs. Shears she thought you wouldn't mind, and it's hard to keep 'em quiet here."

Matt went to the street door and began to explain to Mary.

"You go back," he said. "I'll come as soon as I can. If I'm kept, don't wait later than ten. It may be rowdy in the streets to-night. Peckitt 'll see you home. It mayn't be over yet awhile, and p'raps they'll want me."

"I'll wait for you, Matt," said Mary hurriedly.

He looked at her with glad eyes.

"Will you?" he said. "There's the little children upstairs that you might see to and comfort. But you're tired. Besides, it don't seem fair on the Millards. P'raps you'd best go."

Mary obeyed him, yet, as it seemed, reluctantly. It was as if she had some premonition of what was coming.

Elsie was almost unconscious. She had had, in the afternoon, a paroxysm of pain that had exhausted her, and she had not strength to rally. The doctor had been sent for, but he had just been called away by an accident—a cart, with a company of holiday people and an

incompetent driver, having overturned — and his assistant had gone to Southend. Still, the doctor could not have done anything for Elsie now.

Her mother was standing near the bed, with her apron to her eyes, and when Matt and Selina entered, the girl went up to her and put her arm round her. She had told Elsie she would do what she could for them all.

Matt walked to the bed as softly as he could, but by no means noiselessly. He laid his great hand on the child's little thin one. Elsie opened her eyes and glanced upwards. The shadow of a smile flitted across the small, grey face.

"Well, old lady," said Matt in a gruff whisper, "how are you feelin', eh?"

It was a curious question to ask, but it was difficult to know what to say.

"Do you know who this is, Elsie? Who is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Shears.

Her lips framed his name, "Matt".

"We asked her if she'd like to see you," said her mother, "and she said 'Yes' quite eager.

You've been so kind to her," she sobbed behind her apron. "She ain't one to forget a kindness."

Matt tried to say he had not done anything, but only muttered inarticulately.

As if her mother's words had penetrated to her consciousness and aroused her, Elsie made a sign that she wanted to speak to Matt. Her hand fluttered in his palm, and he saw that she was regarding him anxiously. He bent his head to the pillow.

"I'm listening, Elsie. Don't trouble to speak out. I can hear. Fire away, dear."

"Will you go on helping them," she whispered, "if there's anything you can do? I did try, but you see I couldn't earn."

"I won't lose sight of 'em, Elsie," said Matt.

And he little thought then he would break his word.

"I did try," she repeated, "but I wasn't strong enough, you see."

She sighed.

It was the last time she regretted her failure, this poor, weak creature, on whom the burden of the family had rested.

"I say," Matt said presently, "her hands are getting very cold."

Then they saw she was dead.

Matt was not needed any longer, but he remembered the children upstairs, tired and probably hungry. With his heart full of tenderness, he went up to see to them.

"Come here, you little chaps," said he, "and we'll give you some supper."

Before long they were standing, large-eyed and silent, by the table, eating bread and butter, taking surreptitious bites whenever they thought Matt was not looking.

In the middle of the meal came a light knock at the door. It was Selina.

"Mrs. Shears sent me to fetch 'em," she said shyly.

She always felt shy with Matt now.

"There's no need," said Matt. "Leave 'em here. I'll see to 'em."

At the sight of Selina, the youngest boy, Freddy, threw down his bread and began to cry. This was the signal for the two other children to follow his example.

"Hush!" said Selina. "Can't you make 'em

stop?" She looked at Matt with her tearful eyes. "If you could it'd be a mercy. Shut up, Freddy, else—else you'll make Elsie's head ache."

This appeal had been made to Freddy so many times during the past months that its very familiarity, tiresome as it had become, was comforting. It was the unknown that terrified him, and it was strangely reassuring to hear that he still had the power of giving his sister a headache. He stooped down, and picking up the discarded delicacy, prepared to swallow that and his tears at the same time.

"You leave 'em to me," said Matt. "They can be looked in on in the mornin'."

"Now, youngsters," said Matt, when they had finished eating, "I know what's the best place for you," and he took them into the other room and put them all three in his own bed. Freddy cried a little because he wanted his mother, and then stopped, saying: "Will Elsie's head ache if I ty?" and put his wet cheek on the pillow.

Matt went back into the sitting-room. There was a chair-bedstead in the corner, where his

mother had been wont to sleep. He could just see it in the darkness, which had now crept over everything. He thought he would get it ready for himself. But suddenly he changed his mind. A neighbouring clock struck ten. He remembered Mary. He wished he had bidden her wait. He felt lonely. He longed for her. He might still have the opportunity of saying "Good-night" to her. He would hurry off to the Millards.

He glanced once more at the sleeping children, went softly downstairs, and more softly still past the door of Elsie's room.

The street door closed, but neither Mrs. Shears nor Selina noticed its sound.

"It's not five minutes," said Mrs. Millard, when he put his question, "since they left. Mary, she was for calling to see if you was ready, but I suppose they didn't. How's Elsie?"

Matt told her as briefly as he could, then hurried off. He was pleased and touched by Mary's evident desire that he should see her home.

The bank holiday crowd had not yet dis-

persed. The public-houses were, as usual on such occasions, full to overflowing, and every now and then a man or woman reeled past Matt, singing noisily in horrid drunken mirth. But such sights were familiar to him, and he gave little attention to his surroundings. He was bent on overtaking Mary, if it were only at the door of her home. It would even be a satisfaction to see the outside of the house that contained her, and feel that she was sleeping safely within. The death of the little girl he had known so long, and her touching affection for himself, had roused the graver and more emotional side of his nature. As he walked along, his half-dreamy state gave way to one of more active thought. It was not often that Matt thought deeply, or at any rate continuously, but to-night his brain was very clear. He recalled the incidents in Elsie's life that had connected it with his, the little meetings they had had, the encouraging words he had sometimes spoken to her, and her devotion to himself, which had half amused, half gratified him. She had been a queer, grown-up, weird child. Matt could not picture her as a woman.

Then his thoughts reverted to Mary. How many years ago it seemed since he had first seen her. He was like another man. He recalled his little talk with Cythna. The downward tendency of his nature at that time had been conquered. Conquered? No. It had needed no effort on his part. It had been impossible to fall when every energy was directed towards reaching the place where Mary stood, so high, so high above him. He smiled at the recollection of the evening in the Millards' parlour, and of the family gathering that had appeared to him so ideal. Now he could conceive of something far more beautiful, for in this other home Mary would be, and—Mary's children.

And then he thought of the day when she had promised to be his wife, and they would begin their new, glorious, perfect life together.

His happiness exalted him. His face glowed as he walked. His eyes shone. And yet his feelings were hallowed by the consciousness behind it all of the little friend whose pilgrimage had just ended, and whose hand had

grown cold in his, so that his own seemed the purer for the dying touch.

Meanwhile, as he drew nearer the place where he expected to overtake them, Matt kept a lookout for the two whom he was following. Suddenly his heart leapt up. There they were in front of him. They passed beneath the light of a lamp, and he caught the glint of Mary's hair and the gleam of her snowy dress. He quickened his steps as they passed into the shadow.

The street in which the Peckitts lived was fairly quiet. There were places near that were noisy and thickly populated enough, but this was some little distance from the main road, and, outwardly at any rate, respectable. Still, round the corner, not many steps from Peckitt's, was a public-house, and from this two men emerged and came along the road, meeting and passing Mary and Sam, who were too much absorbed in their talk to notice them. But, for some reason, *they* attracted the attention of the men, for one turned and made a remark to the other, and they looked back and stared at them, and then crossed over the road and stood still.

“Well,” thought Matt, “my walk has not been quite in vain. At any rate, I can say ‘Good-night’ to her.”

At the door of the house they paused. Mary then made as if she were about to enter hastily. But Sam took her by the arm, and pulled her roughly towards him.

“Mary,” he said, “this is not the end of it.”

Then he kissed her.

Matt sprang forward, trembling, voiceless with passion.

The two men glared at each other in silence.

CHAPTER X.

MARY had tried to avoid returning home alone with Peckitt. If she could have done so without exciting his anger and Matt's suspicion, she would have positively refused. Since the afternoon her eyes had been opened to the indubitable fact that this man was in love with her. She was afraid now of possible consequences, and she regretted having let matters drift into this complication. Now that Sam had begun to disparage Matt, she felt a contempt for *him*, and a reaction drew her to her affianced husband. As to Sam, he was becoming reckless. The very knowledge that he had incurred her displeasure made him the more inclined to throw to the winds a restraint which was not natural to him, and which neither circumstances nor education had cultivated. He considered that

in his cousin he had found the one woman for him, and it fretted him to feel that she was beyond his reach. It was galling to recognise the fact that this girl, whom he had thought would be as a reed in his hands, had suddenly stood up firm and straight and defied him. His condition was not improved by the fact that he was feeling far from well. He was already tired of the workshop life, and the heat of London tried him. He had slept badly of late.

When they started homewards, he treated her at first with a sullen coldness, which encouraged her to hope he would leave her alone. But she was mistaken. He was but brooding over the events of the day. At last his smouldering passion broke into fire. It could no longer be restrained.

Sam was still pleading with her when they had been met by Dilkes and Sweetlove. Since his desertion by Matt, the ex-gentleman had gone a step lower for a companion, though not, it is to be believed, much to that companion's detriment. Dilkes recognised Mary, in whom he had taken some slight though not altogether friendly interest, since the day when Matt had

told him he was keeping company, and didn't think he'd come in so often of an evening now.

"That's Furth's girl," he said to Jimmy.
"But it isn't Furth she's with."

"No more it ain't," assented Jimmy.

"Is it off between them?" asked Dilkes, with a faint hope that he might yet regain the society of the one person who had found something to admire in him. Jimmy made no pretence of looking up to Dilkes. He imagined he could teach him as much as he learned, and reverence was at no time one of Mr. Sweetlove's strong points.

"Not to my knowledge," answered Brassy.
"But, bless me, that ain't necessary. Why not two of 'em? Him in the day and this in the evening. That's not an uncommon eggsperience," concluded Mr. Sweetlove. "Why, I've kep' company with as many as three. It only needs management. I've said 'Good-bye' to one of 'em not two turnings afore I was goin' to meet the other. It keeps off monotony."

"Let's see them in," said Dilkes.

When men fall below their social, intellectual, and moral standard, they become exasperatingly

petty. Here was a man who had had a university education actually interesting himself in the amours of a somewhat common-place little country girl. It would be almost incredible if it were not of common occurrence, that the starved mind will greedily devour even dirty crumbs.

When they arrived at the door, something—love or hate, or both—came over Sam like a flood and overwhelmed him in its strength. He never thought if any one were near. Perhaps if he had known that Matt himself was there and watching him, he would still have cried out in tones that were at once passionate and menacing, the words her lover had overheard, and conquering her by his superior strength, have clasped her in his arms.

“Here’s a go,” said Sweetlove in a low voice, for he had recognised Matt.

Mary saw him too, and burst into tears of shame and fear, struggling incoherently to explain that the fault was not hers.

“Go in,” said Matt in a choked voice, pushing her from him. “Leave me to settle with this man.”

She dared not disobey him. She went slowly

up the steps, and having let herself in and closed the door, crouched against it listening for sounds she dreaded, and hearing at first nothing but her own sobs and the loud beating of her heart.

“So that is how much you can be trusted,” said Matt. “Cur! How dare you insult that woman? And when you know she is going to be my wife?”

He spoke incoherently. The words came thickly. It was difficult to understand them. And between each sentence he drew long, difficult breaths. He put up his hand to his throat and loosened his collar. It seemed as if it would choke him.

Sam was much calmer. His passion had spent itself. He answered quite quietly :—

“She won’t be your wife if I can help it”.

Matt’s blood boiled at the insolence of the words, at the assured manner. He raised his hand as if to strike, but it fell at his side. It was the hand Elsie had held. Did he remember it even in that time of fierce excitement, or was the action involuntary? Was the mood of but a few minutes ago still capable of hallowing and

restraining him in spite of this terrible shock, which had made him, as it seemed, a worse man than he had ever been in his life, which had given admittance to demons of fury and awful, devouring hatred?

He gave a laugh that even to his own ears sounded horrible.

"*You* help it? Ha, ha! How can you? She does not care for *you*."

Then said the lying spirit within Sam Peckitt, speaking slowly and deliberately :—

"How do you know that?"

For an instant a pang worse than any he had felt before, jealousy, transformed Matt into a fiend.

"Curse you!" he cried.

Then his voice rang out in scorn of himself for even letting a doubt of Mary's loyalty come near him :—

"You lie, and you know it".

"They're at it," said Brassy, who heard the words. "Let's see the fun."

And the two men crossed over.

"What's up?" inquired Brassy of Matt.

Furth did not answer. He stood still, his

breast heaving, his hands twitching, and his whole face convulsed.

"You'd best leave us alone," said Peckitt. "We are having a tiff about his sweetheart, that's all."

"Don't you dare to name her," Furth cried. "It ain't fit you should speak of her."

"Here, keep calm," said Brassy, trying to be reassuring. "It happened as we see what took place. I wouldn't lay it to heart too much if I was you. Bless you, mate, you ain't the first."

But Mr. Sweetlove's attempt at consolation failed. It had the effect of increasing Matt's fury. He turned on Jimmy in a way that was somewhat alarming to that gentleman, and induced him to skip back a step or two with rapidity.

"Shut up, can't you?" said he with an oath, "and leave us to settle our own affairs."

He neither recognised him nor Dilkes at that moment, though the former was known to him slightly, and the latter not long ago had been his constant associate. And almost immediately their identity was lost in the other onlookers who joined the little group. The sound of the

raised, angry voices had attracted people in the street, windows were thrown up, and women leaned out to see what was the matter; the public-house was constantly letting out customers, many of them by no means averse to seeing a row, nor likely to throw oil on the troubled waters. There was a medley of voices, and questions were asked and answered with a total disregard for truth.

“What’s up, mate?”

“They’re in liquor.”

“’E knocked him down for priggin’ his oof, and now they’re at it.”

“I think I see ’em beginnin’ words just now at the ‘Albert,’” and so forth.

The confused sounds, the crowd of faces, excited Peckitt, but on Matt they had a sobering effect. He was capable of thought for a minute as his anger was diverted from Sam to them; their curiosity and the publicity of the quarrel meant a danger to Mary. It was horrible to him to think that the name of his sweetheart might be in all these mouths. And, moreover, she was near. If she heard, as she must hear, something of what was passing, it would alarm

her and shame her. And she would be afraid, too, on his account. As these thoughts came into his mind he became saner, more his former self. And, in a flash of recollection, he saw little Elsie looking at him with her dying eyes.

What was he doing here?

"Peckitt," he said, in a voice that was almost natural, "come away from this."

"Why?" said Sam. "Here's as good a place as any other. We've got to settle this matter some time. Why not now?"

They were followed by these words spoken very quietly :—

"Why don't you fight it out?"

Nobody (save Dilkes) knew who uttered them, but if they had been shouted out they could not have struck to every heart so distinctly. They found an immediate echo in the crowd. Voice after voice took them up, and in the hubbub that followed even Mary caught the words :—

"Fight it out, men. Fight it out," and strove to pray, and could not.

Then at last Sam caught the enthusiasm, and

he, in his turn, exclaimed, as he tore off his coat :
“ We *will* fight it out, Matt Furth ”.

“ I won’t.”

“ You shall fight me,” Peckitt said. “ Come on, man.”

“ No, no,” Matt answered, beginning, however, to speak hurriedly, as his excitement grew again. “ What good can that do? It can’t help either of us. No, I say. I’ll not fight you.”

“ Fight,” cried the crowd of half-intoxicated onlookers, in dread of being disappointed of their fun. “ Go it. Fight.”

And suddenly, Sam approaching him in a menacing attitude, Matt caught fire and prepared to defend himself.

Once they had begun their combat, they were in deadly earnest. The brute nature in both lay not so very far below the surface but that it could assert itself almost instantaneously. The interest of the crowd, which was manifest enough, encouraged them, and they met in a desperate struggle, the desire in each for the undoing of the other making the contest fiercer as it progressed, and as all other consciousness was merged in the lust of victory.

They were more evenly matched than at first sight appeared. Matt was undoubtedly the stronger, as he was the finer and taller man of the two, but Sam had the advantage in lightness and agility, and was, moreover, possessed of a more scientific knowledge of fighting than Matt, and had the advantage of an acquaintance with one or two tricks which, while he kept his head, served him well. After a short time, however, his control over his mind seemed to go, and he hit out blindly, exhausting his strength in vain efforts, while Matt was still comparatively fresh.

By this time the appearance of the men, already somewhat bloodstained and sufficiently dishevelled, began to alarm the more sober of the crowd, who were as anxious to separate them now as they had been before to bring about the fight. There were murmurs—unfounded, however—that the police were coming, and one or two tried to separate the opponents, telling them they had had enough, that it was time to stop, that they would find themselves in the lock-up, and so on.

But it was too late now. They were past being reasoned with. They had probably even

forgotten the cause of the quarrel, and did but fight for very necessity because the struggle must be maintained to its issue, and one could not be satisfied till the other had yielded or could fight no more. They had been on the ground together more than once, and had risen to wrestle again more like beasts than men, when Peckitt fell, this time suddenly, dragging Matt with him.

On this occasion, however, there was no struggling together on the pavement. Furth rose to his feet almost instantaneously, and stood still, panting. Sam made no effort, as before, to detain him by clutching at his clothes or his person. He lay quite still.

Matt waited, watching for him to rise.

But he did not stir.

For an instant there was perfect silence in the crowd. In that instant the door of Peckitt's room had opened, and the old man, followed by Eliza, had begun to descend the steps. Mary, who, unperceived by him, had watched him down the stairs, followed, keeping close to him. There was light enough thrown upon the scene for her to see that confused crowd of men

grouped round a prostrate figure, and Matt standing erect, without hat or coat, a horrid spectacle.

The momentary silence was broken by a loud shriek.

Matt turned at the sound, and shuddered as he saw her.

Then the madness passed from him, and a trembling and fear possessed him, and he was weak as a child.

Almost before the woman's shriek had died away, long before she had reached her room, whither she fled in blind terror, the hubbub of voices had risen again among the crowd.

"He's fainted. Get some brandy."

"What is it?" asked Peckitt of the first person he touched.

"Row ; one of 'em down," was the answer.

"Water."

"Lift up the poor chap's head."

"Here, you're keepin' all the air off of 'im."

It was Matt himself, however, who got down on his knees somehow and looked into Peckitt's face. Then, raising his arm, he swept back the men who were supporting him, and so remained

and that meek-faced fool of a girl ain't worth either of 'em fighting about. She couldn't do nothing but scream when it come to the point. She ain't *my* style, nor never would have been. Give me a woman with some sperrit, as can fight a man herself, and don't need no one to do it for her. I'd like to see any one a-kissin' Selina Pask against her will. Why," concluded Mr. Sweetlove, with a chuckle, "I s'pose if any one would ha' done it, *I'm* acquainted with him, but Selina can stick up for herself. By which token she's worth fightin' for. Leastways, as much as any woman."

CHAPTER XI.

IN the early morning Mrs. Shears heard the door open, and shuffling footsteps slowly ascending the stairs. Could it be Matt? Had he then been out all night? Her thoughts flew anxiously to her little children, who must have been left alone. She lay wondering what it could mean, longing to wake Selina, who had stayed with her, and was sleeping peacefully in the old chair near the window. A little bird, Cythna's gift to Elsie, was also sleeping. It had crept to the corner of its cage, and nestled there a fluffy ball, to awake when the dawn had fully come, and sing as joyfully as if there were no pain or death or sorrow in the world. Of all God's creatures, birds are surely the most joyful. Her youngest child lay against the mother, its small arm flung across her breast. She raised its hand and

kissed it. Her thoughts in the grey morning were with the dead girl who had been such a help and comfort to her, and who, in the mysterious dispensation of providence, had been taken away just when she needed her most. She lay crying quietly. Suddenly she thought she heard a sound in the next room, the room which had been given up to Elsie. She started up and listened, her heart throbbing painfully. Then she was conscious that some one was groaning.

“Selina!” she cried in a startled whisper.

The girl was awake directly. She sat up and rubbed her eyes. Her face was flushed and her hair ruffled. She looked very young and child-like. A ray of sunlight stole into the room, and shot across her brow.

“Do you want me?”

Mrs. Shears beckoned. In a minute Selina was by her side. Except for her shoes, she was dressed.

“There’s some one in Elsie’s room. Hush!”

She held up her finger, for at that minute the sound of the groan came again.

The ray of sunlight had fallen on the cage.

The little bird stirred, puffed itself out, then gave a chirp.

Selina crept towards the door noiselessly, turned the handle, and looked into the other room.

Then she stood as if paralysed. At the foot of the girl's bed knelt a man. His arms were flung out across it, and his face was hidden against the white sheet, the purity of which was stained with blood. His form shook so that it seemed as though the silent figure beneath the sheet were trembling.

Selina stood like one turned to stone. Mrs. Shears, watching her face, was seized with fear of she knew not what. She put the child's arm from her and sprang up.

The movement she made roused Matt. He lifted his head and looked towards the open door. Blood-stained, bruised, dishevelled, disfigured, in torn clothes, and with that expression of horror in his eyes, it was hard to believe this was the same man who not twelve hours back had been with them in this very room.

Mrs. Shears pushed Selina on one side and

rushed past her. It was evident that Matt had been fighting. Her first thought was for her children.

“Are they safe?” she asked him.

The man looked at her with a dazed, stupid expression. He did not understand to what she referred. He had forgotten the little ones upstairs. She fled to look at them. Her nerves were shaken. Her knees bent under her.

Selina, meanwhile, crept slowly nearer to Matt, drawn by a sort of fascination, while at the same time she was cold with dread, and shocked at the sight of him. Only she saw that he suffered, and she loved him. She laid her hand softly on his arm.

Matt looked at it as if he wondered she should touch him, then he shook it off, staggered to his feet, and muttered :—

“Don’t, girl”.

“What is it?” Selina asked gently. “You are in trouble. You are hurt.”

His eyes roved absently over his person. It was evident that he had no thought of any physical pain, so great had been the mental agony. Now he observed that his holiday

clothes were torn, dirty, stained. He put up his hand to his face ; then, glancing to where it had rested, saw the tell-tale mark which had sullied Elsie's covering. He shuddered. At last his eyes came back to Selina. He read the fear and the pity in her look. He said in a hoarse whisper that froze her blood :—

“ I have killed a man ”.

The little bird in the next room broke forth into its morning hymn. The clear, shrill, jubilant notes pierced the silence. The young child woke at the sound, and laughed to hear it.

“ Sing, dickey,” said her baby voice.

“ I have killed a man,” Matt repeated more slowly, as if to convince himself of a fact he knew to be true, but could scarcely believe.

“ Oh, no, no, no,” cried Selina. “ *You !* ”

Matt stared at her with unseeing eyes. He was living over again the events of last night.

The child, finding itself alone, called : “ Elsie ! ”
Then : “ Muvver ! ”

Matt turned and made as if to move from the room.

Selina watched him despairingly. Brutalised,

strange, horrible as he looked, she only saw in him the man she loved. He was in terrible trouble, and she was powerless to help him.

“Muvver!” called the child again.

“I am coming, darling.”

Mrs. Shears had found the children safe, and two of them sleeping. Freddy was awake. Reassured, she hastened back, her maternal fears now leaving room for her womanly curiosity. She had Freddy by the hand. At sight of Matt he broke into a cry of fear, and, clinging to his mother, hid his face.

“Hush, Freddy,” said his mother, “it’s only Mr. Furth. You ain’t afraid of *him*, surely.”

Matt, cut to the heart, for the child’s terror was like a ratification of his fears, brushed past them and began to ascend the stairs. They followed to the door and stood looking after him. When he had got a little way up, he turned and said gruffly :—

“I had to come down. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, dear, dear,” said Mrs. Shears to Selina, who was still standing where Matt had left her.

"These bank holidays have a sight to answer for."

Matt went back to his room. He had, as he said, been obliged to come down. When he had sat trembling and brooding in the early morning the awfulness of being alone had oppressed him. Yet he was shrinking from the thought of meeting his fellow-creatures. There was only one to whom he turned, involuntarily—the little girl who would never know that he was as he then felt himself to be, a murderer. He had crept noiselessly to the chamber of death. In the stillness and the peace of that room it was as if he met a friend, but here it seemed was an atmosphere of holiness and he was wrapped in a mantle of guilt. About him was the horror of great darkness.

That morning Matt was arrested.

The days that followed were like an awful dream. Everything had an air of unreality. He lived in a black despair that made it of little consequence what should happen to himself. To have taken the life of a fellow-creature was to have destroyed the value of his own. It did not seem to matter much what punishment

should befall him further. At that time the one consciousness overpowered all others. All others but one, the consciousness of Mary. He tried not to think of her, but again and again the memory of Mary's face rose before him as it had looked when he had last seen it, and the scream of horror she had given rang in his ears. In the long days and longer nights when he awaited his trial, he asked himself, how would she act? What was she feeling towards him? Was she sorry for him? Did she perhaps hate him? Must all be over between them? What was he to do?

And he could find no answer.

He only knew that if he was alienated from her he had no desire for release, that life itself would be hateful. She was everything to him, this girl whom he loved. Was it possible that by the rash act of a moment, by an unpremeditated act, indeed, committed for her sake, he had forfeited all she had given him, and all she had promised him? Yet, after what she had seen, could she still take him for her husband? Would not the memory of it make him

hateful to her, come between them in their tenderest moments?

She had sent him no word or line of sympathy. Perhaps the horror at what he had done had dried up the fount of her womanly kindness. When she saw him again it might change her. She might realise that he was the same man who had wooed her and won her heart, and shown her nothing but love and gentleness and kindness throughout his courtship.

He had not written to her, not knowing how to couch his thoughts in fitting words, and the use of the pen not being an easy matter with him. No one else could speak for him. He must wait.

The only person who came to see him while he awaited his trial was Mrs. Mayern. She brought him a message of forgiveness from Mrs. Peckitt.

"She has borne it so nobly, Matt," Cythna told him. "It seems as if she loves you almost as much as her own son. If they don't bring in a verdict of manslaughter against you, I believe you will owe your release to her. You know

it was she who testified at the inquest that he had acute heart disease. And she has asked me to try and find out who was the doctor on board the ship in which he went round the world, because it seems he told Sam any violent excitement would be fatal. Besides, the other day, at the works, he happened to get into some quarrel about a little fellow who was being bullied because he wouldn't 'keep nix,' as they call it, and he nearly fainted when it was over. The boy told Mrs. Peckitt so himself at the funeral."

Matt scarcely listened. Presently he said :
"Have you seen Mary?"

"Yes," said Cythna, looking away from him.

She had gone to Mary at once, full of sympathy. She had never been so intimate with this girl as with some others. Perhaps in her heart she was not very fond of her. But she felt for her now, and was only anxious to help her. At first Mary would not see her. She had shut herself in her room, and would not even speak to Mrs. Peckitt. But at last she had admitted Cythna. The interview had not been a very satisfactory one. When it was over

Mrs. Mayern was conscious of a sentiment towards the unfortunate cause of all this misery not altogether different from that entertained by Brassy Jimmy. Moreover, she could not be sure how far Mary was to blame, whether she had cared more for Sam than for Matt, or had encouraged him. She could only see now that the girl's chief thought was for herself.

"Didn't—didn't she say nothing—about—me?" Matt asked, after an interval.

"She was very much upset," said Cythna. "I didn't stop with her long. She spoke about you a little."

"Does she—hate me?"

"Oh, no, Matt, I don't think she does that. When you see each other you can have your explanations. Every one is so sorry for you, Matt. It is wonderful how many friends you have. And you bear such a good character."

"Is—Mary—well?" Matt asked.

"Yes. She is a little unnerved, of course. But she'll soon get over that."

Cythna tried to turn the subject. When she

was going he said to her, however : " If you see Mary, tell her—tell her I'm thinking about her—all the while".

The first time he saw her was at the trial, and then he scarcely dared to look at her. She was paler and thinner than she had been. She avoided meeting his eyes. From her demeanour he could gather nothing.

But he would soon see her to speak to. He was acquitted. He found himself a free man. It was proved that Sam Peckitt died from heart disease, probably that it was excitement as much as the actual fighting that had brought about the fatal result. There was testimony, moreover, that the fight had been rather forced upon Matt than sought by him. Brassy Jimmy was one who gave evidence to this effect. It was curious that, contrary to his own notions of what was expedient, Mr. Sweetlove should thus appear in public to aid one who was so little known to him. He was certainly somewhat surprised himself, but there he was in the witness-box, the very model of respectability, determined to save Matt and enliven the trial. It happened that Selina had discovered he was present at the fight. He

gave her full and graphic details, and Selina had asked a favour of Brassy.

A day went by after the trial, two, three, then Matt could bear it no longer. He dreaded to meet the Peckitts, but he must see Mary. If she would not take the initiative, he must seek her. It was Saturday when he made up his mind to go. He waited till the evening.

As he drew near the bridge, it occurred to him that Mr. Peckitt might be at the sweet stall. If so, he would speak to him before going further. But there were only the other two men there. He loitered for a while, then went on.

The woman who lived on the first floor admitted him. He did not ask for Mary, but said he was going to see Mrs. Peckitt, and went up the stairs quickly, lest even now he should lose courage.

He knocked, and at first there was no response. Then he knocked again, louder. There was the sound of a moving chair, and a slow, heavy footstep. Then Mrs. Peckitt opened the door, and said, peering into the passage: "Who is it?"

Matt had retreated a step. At sight of her in

her black dress, and with her face looking pale in the twilight, a pang shot through him, and his heart sank.

“Who’s there?” she repeated.

She had been dozing, and her eyes were still heavy with sleep.

“Who wants me? Why . . .” and with a little cry she fell back a step, and stood looking at Matt, who, speechless, could only gaze back at her with sad, appealing eyes.

“Matthew,” she said at last in a whisper, and held out her hand. “It’s—it’s all right, Matt,” she sobbed. “Come in.”

He followed her into the room where he had spent so many happy evenings. It was in disorder, and looked gloomy. Mrs. Peckitt seated herself heavily in her armchair, and alternately looked up at him and wiped her eyes with a deep-bordered handkerchief.

Matt felt more awkward than he had ever done in his life. He longed to say something comforting, but no words came, and he was oppressed by one feeling above all others, a desire to ask where Mary was and an inability to do it.

“Every one has some sorrers,” said Mrs. Peckitt, her red, tearful face, and uplifted eyes and drooping mouth like those of a child in trouble. “We didn’t ought to choose. Some invent all their money and lose it, like Mr. Smith, that had made it in the grocery line off Market Street, and now, as I heard yesterday, hasn’t more than the barrer he stands by ; some is widders, like my sincere friend’s wife ; some, like me, has their children taken from them. We all think our own sorrer the worst, I suppose. But mine it all seem to come at once, suddent, and I’m one that’s sociable-like, and wants folks round me. Peckitt, for all he’s blind, gets out, but my bellicose vein prevents me doing much. Sam, he was good company, poor dear, whatever his faults. And now ——” she paused, and looked at Matt again, half inquiringly. Then she said, in a changed voice :—

“Yours is heavy, too. It ain’t to be supposed you wouldn’t feel it, poor feller, and you so kind disposed. Besides—you—you’ve heerd from her, I suppose?”

“From her? From Mary? No, no. Mrs.

Peckitt, I know I oughtn't to ask any favours of you, but mayn't I see her? She—she hasn't written," he said, stammering so that his words were almost inarticulate.

"She hasn't written? What—don't you know then? Oh, dearie me, I can't—tell you. It—it ain't fair to leave me to tell you, me that couldn't ever abear to see even insecks in pain."

"What is there to tell me?" said Matt. "I can stand it."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Peckitt, "she ought to tell you herself."

"Where is she?" asked Matt. "Let me see her."

"She've gone," said Mrs. Peckitt, bursting into tears. "She've gone home. She said she couldn't abear to see you again. She couldn't like to marry you after all what had took place, and she didn't feel as how she'd have the strength to see you and tell you. And she've gone home."

Matt burst into laughter. But it was a laugh that made Mrs. Peckitt shudder.

"Very well," he said. "Very well. It's

about what I thought. I knew when I see this room she was gone. It's dark, dark, dark."

He covered his face with his hands, then uncovering it again, he asked fiercely :—

"Didn't she never really love me?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Peckitt, "she loved you, Matt. But Mary, she's one of them respectable girls what . . . Oh, dearie me, she was a good girl, but weak like. She couldn't stand up against the shame, Matt."

"She might have seen me," he cried.

"Yes," said Mrs. Peckitt, weeping feebly, "I told her that, but she said : 'No, it was best to go. I couldn't marry him,' she said, 'and it'd hurt us both to meet. And I'm afeared.' Oh, I wish she'd never come here a-spoilin' both your lives. I wish Sam hadn't come back till she was gone. I wish ——"

"Wishin' can't cure it," said Matt bitterly. "But you're right when you say my life's spoilt. I don't care that for it now." He snapped his fingers. "Good-night, Mrs. Peckitt. Good-bye. You've been a kind friend to me. And thank you for not having spoke cruel to-night."

"Oh, I wish I hadn't had to tell you, that I

do, I do. It weren't my fault, Matt. I'd as soon ha' thought of kickin' poor Eliza."

"You couldn't help it," said Matt. "Good-night, Mrs. Peckitt. I'll always remember how good you've been to me. See here, I wish it was me that was dead and not Sam. He had the luck of it. And I haven't ~~got~~ no mother to care, neither."

Mrs. Peckitt threw her handkerchief over her face.

Matt, selfish in his grief, stumbled out of the room and down the stairs. Instinct rather than volition led him towards home. He was conscious of nothing around him till a hand was laid upon his arm, and he heard his name spoken.

He looked round, and saw Dilkes.

"Where are you going, mate?"

"I don't know," answered Matt with truth.

"I'm all alone. Come and spend the evening with me," Dilkes said.

The other man, worn with his recent unwonted excitements and emotions, was ready to welcome help from any quarter. Just then Dilkes, with his more nervous nature, his greater will power,

could have made him do whatever he wanted. There was no resistance in Matt, no care as to what befel him. He suffered himself to be led away. He did not regret it. He found temporary forgetfulness. But he had taken the first downward step of the perilous path from which he had once turned aside,

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER his trouble, Matthew Furth avoided most of his former mates for awhile, because, though there was a good deal of sympathy felt for him, and no one, at any rate openly, blamed him, yet in his new sensitiveness the rough, kindly allusions to what had happened hurt him more than any one suspected. He had become somewhat morbid, perhaps, for he had been sociable enough formerly, but it may be that the refining influence which his love for Mary had had upon him made his suffering more acute than it would otherwise have been. Besides this, his unlimited faith in her as the ideal woman made her treatment of him kill much of his confidence in his fellow-creatures. If *she* could act as she had done, what was to be expected from others? That she might refuse to marry him now, to link her

life with that of one who, though the law absolved him from guilt, might morally be considered (as he sometimes appeared to himself) a murderer ; that she might do this, he had held sufficiently probable to be prepared for it, and he was ready to accept her decree as just, even though it slew his happiness. But it was what seemed to him the cruelty of her method that was incomprehensible to him. He could not enter into the colder, calmer nature of the girl. He put himself in her place. He knew that nothing which should befall her of shameful or terrible, no sin which she could commit, would have made him turn from her in her hour of need without a word of kindness ; rather, he would have clung to her all the more because she wanted him.

It may be that if Mary had seen him and talked to him she, too, would have been tender-hearted, but she would not run that risk. She came to the conclusion that after what she had seen, after what had occurred, she could not bear to marry him, and she saw no good in harrowing their feelings by mutual explanations. She had grown afraid of her lover. She dreaded scenes, violent emotions. Perhaps, too, she felt he would

accuse her. And, indeed, her conscience did not altogether absolve her of offence. Sam's tragic fate, following, as it had, on her own quarrel with him, had caused a reaction in her feeling towards him. She even believed he had a stronger hold on her affection than Matt. She had never truly loved the latter. Of that she felt more and more assured.

She took no one into her counsel. She waited, tossed to and fro, till after the trial. The very next morning she packed her things and went away, back to her home in the country.

Perhaps, when she got there and had had time for calmer reflection, when, moreover, days and weeks went by and she did not hear from or of him, except when she received Mrs. Peckitt's letter telling of their interview, she had better, more unselfish thoughts. She remembered Matt's many kindnesses, the happy times they had had together, sometimes she felt regret, wonder as to what he thought of her, something like pity for his loneliness. But she made no sign. And they drifted apart.

But Matt was intolerably lonely. He was conscious that he was slipping downward rapidly,

and, in spite of his hours of recklessness, the knowledge cost him bitterness of spirit. It seemed as if he were losing everything at once, that life had become utterly valueless, that now even his self-respect was going.

Selina watched him sadly. She was constantly in and out of the Shears ; in fact, it had become a second home to her, and there was some talk of her making it one in reality, and taking Elsie's place. When Matt was out she would go upstairs and clean up his rooms and make them tidy. It was Mrs. Shears' work, but Selina insisted on doing it. And if Matt had been in a condition to notice such things he could not have failed to be struck by the improvement in the matter of cleanliness. He sometimes thought he would not stay where he was, but go away and get work elsewhere. He had lost interest in these rooms, which were to have been Mary's home, where he had pictured her many a time, for which he had already bought little articles of furniture such as he thought a woman would like. They were common enough things in reality, but to Selina, who had never seen any pretty furniture except

that which Mrs. Mayern had, they appeared quite luxurious, and received the utmost care in handling and rubbing. That they should ever belong to her was a notion far out of the range of her thoughts. Though she had at first felt, as she once confessed to Cythna, that Matt and she would some day come together, the feeling had faded during his engagement, and so far from being renewed by the termination of that engagement, had died utterly. She never thought of herself at all in the matter. Her only thought was for him. She noticed that he was changing, and for the worse. Her heart was full of sympathy and sorrow. Her simple prayers were full of him. She wanted him to be comforted. But that which happened was most unlooked for. Almost before people had ceased to talk about Sam Peckitt's death and to point at Matt as he went by, almost before every one knew for certain that all was at an end between him and Mary, he had asked Selina to marry him.

He acted on impulse.

One Sunday afternoon in the winter, a gusty, east-windy day, the Millards were gathered in

their parlour. The months which had passed since Matt met Mary Dove there seemed to have made no difference to them, except that the children were a little bigger. To-day it was Albert who sat at the window, and read a child's temperance story of a deeply improbable nature, such as was congenial to the mind of the youthful member of the Phoenix band, who promised to be first a prig and then a fine little fellow. Maggie, pretty and bright-faced, was helping her mother to prepare tea. Bobby lay on the rug with white hairs, through which he had suffered so much, but for which, probably from its comfortable proximity to the fire, he had an unconquerable affection. To-day he was not engaged on a Noah's ark, but a Scripture puzzle consisting of several pieces, which, put together, would represent the group of Joseph and his brethren. It was exceedingly difficult to fit the right faces on the brothers, and Bobby had to try many experiments before Judah and Reuben and Simeon were properly provided for. Benjamin was less difficult. He was so ostensibly the youngest, and he wore no turban.

John sat in his usual place by the fire, genial

and smiling. Things were prospering with him, and he was inclined to take cheerful views of life and matters in general. On his lap lay a number of the *British Workman*, which he had been enjoying with his Sunday pipe.

Teddy was not there. He was suffering from an attack of bronchitis, and had to be kept in one room in the warmth.

Albert came to the end of his book and looked up.

"Mr. Furth's over the road," he said.

"Where?" said Millard with some interest.

"Go and fetch him; look sharp."

"I'll catch him," said Bobby, glad to relinquish his puzzle, with which he was getting annoyed, and he was out of the room and across the road in no time.

"Mr. Furth," he cried, "come and have tea."

Matt, who had purposely avoided looking across the street, hesitated before he answered.

"You'd best," said Bobby impatiently. "There's a prime cake—I see mother at it yesterday—and jam."

"I don't know as I'm wanted," said Matthew, glancing, nevertheless, somewhat wistfully to

where two or three faces were pressed against the glass, for his Sundays were dreary days now.

"Why," said Bobby, astonished, "father sent Albert, only he was so slow in comin' I slipped over."

Without another word, Matt accompanied him. He looked and felt uncomfortable for a few minutes, but the hearty greeting they gave him, John's hand-shake, and Martha's "*Well, I am* glad Albert see you, but you didn't ought to want asking," set him comparatively at his ease.

Matt asked after Teddy.

"You shall see him after tea," said Mrs. Millard, feeling drawn to Matt for his remembrance of the baby, and, being a woman, because he looked sad. As a matter of fact, his appearance had not changed for the better. His face had lost its bright, healthy look, and was coarser.

"If he'd take to some good woman it'd be the saving of him," thought Mrs. Millard.

After tea, during the singing of hymns, she took him in to see Teddy. The child was awake. He smiled at Matthew, and wrinkled up his small nose in his old way.

"There," said his mother delighted, "that's the first time I seen him smile to-day, and he's generally so bright. He remembers you, I do believe."

Matt felt pleased.

"Shall I take him up a bit?" he asked.

"Why, you might. Only keep the blanket round him. It ain't such a bad attack, but the draughts get about, and it's a time of year one must be careful."

The child lay contentedly in the strong arms, and blinked at the fire. It put one little hand round Matt's thumb.

Martha watched the two. She understood that the child would do him good.

"He's grown heavier," said Matt.

"It's such a long time since you've seen him," said Martha reproachfully. "Why do you keep away?"

Matt stirred uneasily.

"You know well enough."

"I'm not sure as I do," said Martha stoutly. "You have some sort of company. Why not that of friends as care for yer and feel with yer?"

Matt was silent.

"That girl ain't the only one. There's others. Matt Furth, if you had a wife and little uns like Teddy there, it'd be the saving of you. Next to my John, there isn't one I'd sooner trust than you."

He was silent still.

"You ain't offended?" said Martha, after a pause.

"No," he shook his head. "You're kind, but you don't understand. It's all happiness with you."

"I haven't always been happy. John," she said shyly, as if the very admission were disloyal, "John weren't my first. But I'm glad I waited. You'll maybe find one not so showy but more true. I thought her stuck-up that day at Greenwich."

Matt moved impatiently. He was too loyal to Mary to let others run her down.

"There's only one I can think of," said Martha presently, "and that's that Pask girl. But I suppose she'd hardly be your style. I wish Elsie Shears had lived. She'd have been over young, but she was the sort that would have

made a managing woman. None of the others 'll have the grit in them what Elsie had. They more favour the mother."

Matt paid little attention to her. He had no thought of marrying Selina or anybody else, and yet her words clung to his mind.

As he went home he recalled something which had happened the day after he had learned from Mrs. Peckitt that all was over between him and Mary. Selina had heard it too. She had known before he did that Mary had gone away.

Mrs. Shears had sent her up to dust Matt's room. They thought he had gone back to work, as he had announced his intention of doing, but such was not the case. He was sitting in his chair by the empty grate, staring into it despairingly. He was feeling the reaction of the false excitement with which Dilkes had supplied him. He was tired, depressed, utterly wretched. Haggard, unshaven, he looked very unlike the man who had fired Selina's girlish imagination and won her heart, but his abject, dreary look only seemed to make her care the more.

She glanced at him from time to time, her whole being possessed by a yearning pity which it seemed impossible for her to express. Matt appeared unconscious of her presence. There was only one woman in the world for him, and he had put a barrier between them. And if he had known that Selina loved him, the knowledge would scarcely have stirred him from his present apathy. So Selina went on with her dusting quietly, and the tumult of love and sorrow which his suffering caused her had to be quelled as best it might.

When she had finished, she went towards the door. Then she turned for a last look. Neither his attitude nor his expression had changed. She gazed, hesitated, then stole back towards him.

“Mr. Matt.”

He did not hear her apparently.

“Mr. Matt,” said Selina, her heart throbbing painfully, “dear Mr. Matt, I am so sorry.”

He looked up at her.

“Thank you, Selina.”

As her eyes met his, it was more than she could bear. She burst into tears.

“Oh,” she cried, “don’t look like that. Oh,

dear Mr. Matt, it will come right somehow, I am sure it will."

Furth shook his head.

"It can't never come right, Selina."

"Oh, why did it happen? why did it? Won't you ever look happy again, like you used to do? Oh, can't it come right somehow? P'raps she'll change. P'raps——" her tears choked her.

"Don't cry, Selina," said Matthew gently. "Don't cry, girl."

Poor Selina. She was only a poor untutored creature, and she had not her feelings under control as well as some of her better-trained sisters. The kind tone, the thought for her, broke down the remnant of her ~~self-respect~~ *pride*.

"Oh, I can't help it," she cried. "I love you so. Mr. Matt, my dear, good, kind Mr. Matt, I wish I could ha' saved you from it. I love you. I always have loved you. And now you're so unhappy, and I can't do nothing for you."

She flung her arms across the side of his chair, and hid her face upon them.

Furth looked down upon her with a sort of wonder. He had not grasped the full significance of her words, perhaps because he had not

got out of the habit of regarding Selina Pask as a child, but a consciousness as to the reality of her sympathy shone like a glimmer of light on the darkness of his desolation. The sight of the bowed head and the sound of Selina's weeping made a lump rise in his throat.

He just touched her arm.

"Don't," he said in a choked voice.

Selina looked at him with streaming eyes.

"Mr. Furth," she sobbed, "if there's anything I can do, will you ask me? You've done me a many kindnesses. I can't never forget them."

"All right," said Matt huskily. "Hadn't you best be going, Selina?"

She rose to her feet.

"Yes, I'm goin'."

She took a few steps, then came back once more.

"Mr. Matt," she whispered, "I wish she'd stuck to you."

A dull flush leapt over his face. She hastened from the room, alarmed at her own courage, yet glad she had said those last words.

The noise of the closing door was followed by a sound that it is as well Selina did not hear.

It would have haunted her for many a day. The weeping of a strong man is terrible, and she had drawn from Matt the first tears he had shed since, unashamed, he had wept by the grave of his poor old mother.

This scene came back to his mind as he walked home from Mrs. Millard's. It happens thus sometimes. A remark which scarcely sounded intelligible to the ear, reaches the brain long after it is spoken; so words and scenes which apparently made little impression upon the consciousness, suddenly stand out vividly on the memory. Matt remembered that Selina had said she loved him.

He was turning in at the gate of his house when the girl herself came out. She had been with the Shears. He stood and waited for her.

"Going home, Selina?"

She started at his voice.

"Yes."

"I'll come with you."

She accepted his escort in silence, and they walked in silence the length of the street.

Presently he said:—

"Isn't it lonely for you, Selina?"

"Not so very," said the girl. "I ain't in much, and Mrs. Biggs, they're so crowded, she's glad to let Nancy come in of nights, and I hire her granny's bed at a penny a week."

"You're very brave, Selina."

"Not me. Sometimes I sort of grumble inside because I don't belong nowheres, but I try and keep it in. You've got to get along, you know."

"Selina," said Matt suddenly, "will you marry me?"

The girl stopped short where she was. The moon was bright. He could see her face. It was upraised. He was not capable of understanding all it expressed, only its earnestness almost frightened him. He realised, for the first time, that Selina was beautiful, and that she was a woman. For the minute he thought he loved her.

"Is it—is it—" she said presently, "because—you're sorry for me?"

"No, my girl. It's because I'm sorry for myself. I'm not as strong as you, Selina. I can't live all alone."

"I'll come," she said, or rather sobbed, in a mixture of rapture and pain. "You don't say

as you love me, and I wouldn't be married for pity, but if so be as you need me, I'll serve you true all the days of my life."

Poor Selina. She lay wakeful all the night while Nancy Biggs was snoring. She had got what she wanted. She could love him and minister to him, and shelter him. But the gift came, as is so often the case, with something wanting.

She had said once: "I sort of fancy I might like one who didn't care for any one special, and then suddent he'd see *me*, and then he'd love me *only*".

CHAPTER XIII.

BRASSY happened to find himself in Notting Hill one day. He had followed a cab from Broad Street. It was a disappointing business, for the young woman who got into the cab had a mild and gentle expression, and she was accompanied by two or three boxes and several packages.

"She'll do," thought Jimmy, and forthwith he began to run.

In course of time the cab arrived at Ladbroke Grove, and the young lady prepared to get out. Jimmy, hot and dishevelled and breathless, presented himself with due officiousness, but the young lady, for all her softness of expression, proved a terrible deception, for she regarded him with great severity, and informed him in the most determined tones that she had no need of his services, and that he had better depart ; and

before he had time to remonstrate, or even lay a finger on a parcel, the front door opened, and a stern and solemn butler appeared, followed by the young lady's brother, who evidently meant to make short work of Mr. Sweetlove. Jimmy adopted an injured tone, and appealed to their pity, but the brother asserting what was an incontestable fact, that no one had asked him to tire himself out, and ominously hinting that if he made himself a nuisance there was a policeman within call, Mr. Sweetlove, muttering expressions of contempt, and more than ever convinced that no reliance was to be put on the appearance of young women, wandered slowly off.

But he did not see why he should waste his day ; and, moreover, having spent more than usual the last few days, and being at no time of a saving disposition, he was rather impecunious. It happened that, as he sauntered down the road, he saw a curate. The curate, Jimmy concluded, should come to his assistance, and he followed him, meditating in what way he could best touch the heart of this dispenser of charity. He had not quite determined on his mode of appeal, when the curate arrived at his lodgings and went in.

Jimmy noted the number, and then strolled away into some of the smaller streets behind Portland Road. He made his observations, and not wishing to give the curate an opportunity of going out again, he now boldly returned to the house, and asked the maidservant if he might see the parson.

"What name?" asked she, not particularly surprised by his appearance, for she was used to strange visitors for the lodger; and Jimmy, seeing no cause for concealment, told her "Mr. Sweetlove".

He was then ushered into the presence of the curate. The latter was a young man, and looked kind, but Jimmy could see he was not one to be easily deceived. He evidently had his wits about him. Jimmy assumed a bashful expression and cast his eyes down. On the table lay a letter addressed to the Rev. W. Bondin. Jimmy was reassured by this. It is as well to know a person's name when one is about to pretend to a knowledge of his character.

"Good-morning," said Mr. Bondin. "Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, sir. You don't know me, sir," touching

his forelock (his hair happened to be very short),
“but I knows you. And I hardly likes to pre-
suum on your charity, because you’ve got that
name for bein’ always willin’ to help the poor.”

“Well?” said the curate, feeling that here was
one of the cadgers to whom he was not unaccus-
tomed. “Well, what then?”

“Why, that’s why I come, sir. I wouldn’t
have ventured with some, but we all know in
these parts you treats ’em alike, deserving or
undeserving.”

“On the contrary, I try to discriminate.”

“That’s so, in course,” responded Jimmy.
“In one way, so to speak. But you ain’t too
hard on chaps. I’m not sure, sir, altogether, as
I mightn’t be catalogued with them that’s unde-
serving. The fact is, sir, I’m a thief.”

Mr. Bondin was rather pleased with the
candour of his visitor.

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Ah,” answered Jimmy, “and I’m sorry to
own it. But I mean to give you facts only, for
I was advised to come to you and tell you my
trouble.”

“Sit down. How can I help you?”

“ Well, yer see,” said Jimmy, obeying, for he was rather tired, “ I only come out o’ prison this mornin’. I’m a married man, with two children. My poor wife’s heart was nearly broke when I went wrong, and she ain’t strong neither. I wants to be steady for her sake. There’s a person I know who can give me work next week. But the people where I live says as they won’t keep me any longer than to-night unless I pays ’em something off the rent. And then what’s to become of ’Liza and the little ones?”

“ Who is your friend?”

Jimmy thought rapidly.

“ Oh,” he said, “ he’s a man up in Hoxton what has a home where them that’s come out of prison can get work, and then they gets a character and can go back to employment regular.”

“ Well,” said the curate, “ I make a rule never to give relief to people before I have called to see them at home.”

“ See,” said Brassy, who had observed a notice outside the church, and read it with a view to its possible usefulness, “ could you call

to-night? I've got to be out this afternoon, but I'll be in at seven."

"No," replied the curate, "I'm sorry to say I have an engagement at seven, but I'll come to-morrow morning."

"I wish it could ha' been to-day," said Jimmy, with a sigh. "Yer see," he added, with a very mysterious air, and almost in a whisper, "there's another thing I'm afraid of. You won't tell any one, will yer? It might do me a deal of harm if it was to get known, because, yer see — No one can't hear, can they?"

"Oh, no," said the curate. "And you needn't in the least fear I shall mention what you choose to tell me."

"Well, yer see," continued Brassy, "there's a certain set of men as I was with, and it was all through them I got in prison, and if I have to go back to them I'll be stealing again. I've heerd as you're one of them, like him over at Hoxton, what tries to help thieves. Can't yer do something for me to-night, sir?"

"Well," said the curate, "where do you live? What is the address of the place where your wife and children are?"

Brassy hesitated not a moment, though it was with slight inward trepidation that he named a house in Heathfield Street, "top storey," and he was relieved when the curate wrote it down without comment.

"Well," said the latter, "here is half a crown, and I'll call in the morning."

"Yes, sir, and thank you kindly, sir. It'll be the saving of me. You make me think of the parable of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan. If it hadn't been for that Samaritan the prodigal wouldn't ever have repented, in *my* opinion."

"You had better take to reading your Bible more carefully," said the curate with some severity.

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy rose. He was not anxious for the words of advice the curate wished to administer, but he listened to them meekly. They were not many, as a parish meeting claimed the reverend gentleman, who dismissed Mr. Sweetlove when the interview was over.

"What did you say you were before you got

into trouble? " he inquired, when Jimmy reached the door.

"Well, sir, I was trained to the brass-moulding, but I gave it up. Since I chucked that I've turned my hand to most things. There's not much," he concluded, with a twinkle in his eye, "that comes amiss to me, sir."

Mr. Sweetlove lunched off sausage rolls without a pang of conscience. He then strolled in the direction of the Potteries, where he thought it probable he might come across an acquaintance or two. He had some notion, too, of looking for new lodgings. He did not care for the old room now Selina was no longer under the same roof. He was annoyed with her for preferring Matthew Furth to himself, and could only attribute it to the unreasonableness of women.

"There's no accounting for 'em," he said to Dilkes. "I believe she'll regret it. What's second-hand love?"

Dilkes thought, too, that she would regret it, but for other reasons than that which Jimmy had in his mind.

Before very long Jimmy was met by an old donkey cart in which a youth was seated on a sack. Otherwise the cart was empty.

Brassy knew by sight the cart and its occupant.

"Hullo!" he said. "Hi! Stop, will yer?"

Josiah Wiltshire gave a jerk to the reins, and the willing beast stood still.

"Wal, what then?"

"I've got to get back to your parts, and would be glad of a lift in your conveyance. You shall have a drink for fare."

Josiah was at no time prepared to refuse refreshment.

"Where's the oof?" he inquired, however, for Brassy had not the appearance of wealth.

Jimmy satisfied him on that score.

"In with you."

They met the curate returning from his meeting.

"Drive a bit faster," said Mr. Sweetlove.

"It looks as if he's got with one of those companions he was afraid of," said the curate, with an uneasy feeling, lest after all he had been swindled.

But when he went to Heathfield Street the next day the fear was put beyond a doubt. Neither the old woman who lived in the top storey nor any one else had ever heard of Mr. Sweetlove.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR the first few weeks after her marriage, which followed close upon her engagement, Selina was in a state of bliss. She went about with a radiant face that reflected the joy in her heart ; and she was so full of love that, if she could have fulfilled her desires, the whole neighbourhood would have been the richer and better and happier for her existence, and London, which to Selina represented the world, would have been an earthly paradise. As for Matt, she could not do enough for him, and the black cloud which had hung over him of late was driven away by the sunshine of her presence. When he came back from work he found his home neat and clean and bright. Everything that could shine was shining with all its might ; it was a wonder the furniture or Selina herself was not worn out

by the amount of rubbing and polishing that went on, but both seemed the better for it. Selina's gaiety, her childish delight in her possessions, her pride in herself and her husband, could not but affect the latter. Matt caught the infection of her happiness, and the neighbours, who had wondered, and, in many cases, expressed garrulous disapproval at the inconstancy of men, or the want of pride in young women, began to wag their heads knowingly, and say they had always thought it would turn out a happy marriage.

But there were two things against such a consummation. The one was that Matt was not in love with Selina, and the other that the drink-craving had got hold of him.

He was not in love with Selina. She was to him like a bright, sweet child, and the great, strong man could not help being fond of her, and touched by her love for him. Only he had not ceased to care for Mary. As the time went by, and his anger against her lessened, his desire for her reasserted itself. A man's love for a woman is not measured by her love to himself, or necessarily by the rectitude of her conduct

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towards him. Matthew began to make excuses for Mary, to reproach himself for want of spirit in not seeing her, to wonder if he had acted too hastily in putting this barrier of his marriage between them. He tried to cast away these thoughts, but they would arise. Sometimes, when Selina came and stole her hand into his, he was thinking of Mary ; then, in his self-reproach, he would be very tender towards his comforter, and feel a brute for having been unfaithful to one who, in her generosity, had given him all she had to give. And yet, mingled with this, was a half-unconscious resentment towards Selina for having been the instrument of his unfaithfulness to the memory of Mary.

And then he had a letter from the latter. She had heard of his marriage. She wrote to him and wished him happiness. It was a sad little letter, written under the influence of the new knowledge that she had lost him for ever. Woman-like, she valued, or fancied she valued him now that he had proved himself independent of her. There was something regretful, almost tender, about the note, a subtle suggestion, not expressed indeed, but implied, that if he had waited all

might have been well between them. Matt, at any rate, felt it. Selina unconsciously increased the impression. Letters were too rare an event in that establishment for this to be kept a secret, even if he had desired to do so. He and Selina, indeed, spelt it out together.

"Matt," cried the young wife involuntarily, "I believe she loves you still. Oh," she added, secure in her own possession, "I do feel sorry for her."

Poor Selina. Why did she say that, "I believe she loves you still"?

All day the words rang in Matt's ears. If only he had waited. Was Mary, then, suffering? Had *he* made her? Had he failed to understand a nature more delicate than his own, and judged her by a wrong standard? Why had he been in such haste to console himself? They would have been so happy together, he and Mary. If he were happy with Selina, how much more if, instead, he had married the woman he loved? And she? Would she have been as contented, as glad, as devoted as Selina was? If so, what might not life have become?

So, not consecutively and clearly, but as his

mind was capable of forming them, came images, suggestions, longings, mingled with dissatisfaction with himself for permitting them. He became restless and unhappy.

That evening, as it happened, one of the Shears' children was not well. Selina, in the inevitable absence of the mother, made a sacrifice of her evening, and gave up an hour to the child. When she went back to their room, Matthew was not there. She waited for him till she fell asleep in her chair from sheer weariness. When he came in, it was evident he had been drinking.

Never had Selina alluded to this temptation of Matt's. Her experiences with her own father, dimmed as they were by time, were yet vivid enough to have left some mark upon her. That Matt should follow in his steps seemed too awful a possibility to contemplate. Selina considered it more or less inevitable that there should be a drunkard in every family. She judged as she had seen. But Matthew, her Matt! She had noticed how, in the weeks that followed his trouble (when gloom at the remembrance of having taken a life, or bitterness at the con-

sciousness of having lost Mary, had made him seek oblivion, or, at any rate, distraction), there were signs of his possibly giving way to the evil thing, but now when he was happy——

Was he happy?

As she lay wakeful, crying quietly from dread and sorrow, he called out in his sleep. She listened, trembling. It was to Mary he was speaking. He was asking if it were too late. He groaned, as if one had answered that it was.

The next morning he was very repentant. He confessed to Selina that he had been worried during the day and that he feared he had taken too much in the evening. He asked her forgiveness.

She did not tell him what she had heard. Things looked different by daylight. After all, she said to herself, people were not responsible for what they said in sleep, or for the dreams they had, and doubtless Matthew's thoughts were in the past.

"And," she argued with a heavy heart, "after all, I can't expect as he's forgot her *yet*."

But whatever she might say to herself or him, Selina was conscious of a certain shadow that stood between her and perfect happiness. It had crept in that day, it grew deeper as the weeks and months went by ; she tried to escape from it, but it settled down more and more heavily. The influence of the man Dilkes had been like that of an evil spirit. He had begun the work. Perhaps he would have regretted it if he had seen to what it would lead, if he had known that what would have been no danger to some men, was full of danger to Matt : that he was like one who inherits a tendency to a certain disease, and must, therefore, avoid what another may do with impunity. His absorbing love for Mary had been temporary salvation, but the attraction Selina had for him was not sufficient to make him proof against the temptation. It almost seemed as if his temporary restraint had made his present relapse more violent ; in a sort of recklessness he gave the rein to his passion, and it ran away with him. Before he had been married a year, it became evident to every one who came in close contact with him, that Furth was going to the dogs.

He was no longer so regular in his work, and they grew poorer. One or two of the presents which had been bought for Mary were got rid of by Selina.

Selina never spoke to any one of her trouble, not even to Cythna. Mrs. Mayern, who knew more of human nature than either Matt or Selina, had strongly advised her not to contract this marriage too hastily. She had foreseen the possibility that Matthew might regret having acted so impetuously ; that, whether or no there were any excuses to be made for him, he was not treating Selina fairly ; that a man must be either weaker or stronger than poor Matt to put away the one real love of his life at once and be happy with the woman who loved *him*. She knew, too, the tendency to drink, which had been apparently conquered, indeed, but through human, not divine aid ; when that was withdrawn on which he had leaned, and which had been unconsciously his support, might he not fall again ? She urged Selina to wait a while.

"It's now he wants me," Selina had answered. "I think I ought to marry him at once."

Cythna looked at her pityingly. In some

ways this girl was such a mere child. She could not understand how life looked to the woman who had been married and a mother, and widowed and childless, and who had seen and read much of the lives of others, made or marred, saved or wrecked, through love.

"It means so much, Selina," she had said. "And you must remember how short a time back Matt gave his heart to Mary Dove. Do you think you could bear to live with a man who loved some one else all the time?"

"But she've given him up," said Selina, "and he need me all the more to comfort him."

"I wasn't thinking of him," said Mrs. Mayern almost impatiently. "I was thinking of you."

Mrs. Mayern was the first to notice when Selina said no longer, "*I am* so happy," when the beaming look faded from her face.

Perhaps Matt noticed it too. At any rate, he had fits of bitter remorse. Changed as he was, he was not so unlike his old self as ~~to~~ willingly

and help you. I want to help you, Matt. Perhaps by-and-by you'll learn to conquer it."

The man would shake his head. He knew better. But he did not want Selina to leave him. She was still his little comforter. She grew to be necessary to him, more and more necessary as time went on and other things seemed slipping away from him.

Cythna's power over him had gone. He avoided her, he avoided the parson, he avoided such of his friends as he had most respected in old times, the ones who would have tried to save him now. He was afraid of them. They emphasised the difference between his present and his past.

But Selina never lost hope for him; she believed all along that this could not last, that the worst degradations of a drunkard's life could not befall him, that he would be saved somehow. She had drawn very near to God in her loneliness; in an imperfect way perhaps, but to some extent deeply, she realised heavenly things. She was ignorant, she understood very little, but she loved. Cythna had tried to teach

her, and the pupil had best repaid her instruction by turning from her to God Himself. That was why there was always something gentle about her, even in her trouble she did not become hard or bitter. It was disloyal to speak about her husband to any but the one Friend who understood all about it, but she had to tell Him, or she could not have borne the weight of her loneliness: so it came about that she crept nearer and nearer to the Light.

Sometimes Mrs. Shears wondered, as she heard Selina actually singing at her work.

"Ah," she said to herself, "it's because she's young. When she's come to my time she'll find trouble cling closer."

Mrs. Shears shed many a tear over Matt herself.

"To think of what he was," she would say, "that bright and kindly. If trouble hadn't come to him he'd have kep' straight all along. Well, I can't never forget he was good to Elsie."

At last there came a day when Matt struck his wife.

He had been in one of his restless moods.

He had gone out, and returned mad with drink. She said something that angered him. He raised his heavy hand and struck her. It was well for him that the blow was not better aimed, or the result might have been most terrible. As it was, she bore the mark of it.

In the morning he saw the bruise. He remembered something, not much, of what had taken place. He came up to her as she was laying the breakfast things, and caught her in his arms.

"Selina," he said, "was it *I*? Did *I* do that?"

"You did not know what you were doing," she answered with trembling lips.

"Good God!" he cried. "Am I such a brute?"

He swore an oath.

"I will run no risk," he said, "of doing that again. Selina, why don't yer reproach me? Why don't yer punish me in some way?"

For answer she put her arms round his neck and sobbed out something she had been meaning to tell him for days.

He listened, awed.

That which had once been the desire of his

heart was to be realised. A touch of the old chivalry which he had felt for his mother made him realise the sacredness with which approaching motherhood invested his wife.

And he had struck her!

He was not fit to take charge of her, of the child. He was afraid of himself, afraid for her. He knew how husbands such as he might become, treated their wives. He remembered her mother's fate, and shuddered. Things were bad enough as they were. They might get worse. There seemed to him only one thing to be done.

He sat with her for some time, and went late to his work.

"You've been a dear little wife to me, Selina," he said. "God bless you. It's a happiness to feel you ain't never spoke bitter to me. I've ruined your life. Promise me you won't never change, that whatever come you'll think as kind of me as you can. . . . Perhaps—when it come—the child'll sort of make up for what you've gone through. You've ~~got~~ friends—there's Mrs. Mayern, and her downstairs—and——" he paused, struggling with a refractory lump in his throat.

"I don't want no one but you, dear," she said, looking at him through her tears. "When you're gentle like this, when you speak kind to me, I don't want no other friend."

He kissed her.

"Good-bye, girl," he said. "Good-bye, little wife."

He left her happy.

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, "this'll change him. The little child will do what I couldn't. He'll be himself again. We shall be jest what I once hoped, may be more."

She put up her hand to brush the hair off her forehead. She touched the place which was bruised, and involuntarily flinched. Her head ached. She seated herself wearily. But before long she smiled again.

"Now *he* knows," she said, "I can tell Mrs. Mayern."

Matthew, meanwhile, was walking up and down outside the house, as if irresolute. Finally, just when Selina had concluded that she would go and see Cythna, he set his shoulders doggedly, and strode away, in the

direction, not of the docks, but of the railway station.

He had made up his mind on the impulse of the moment. Before night came he had changed it more than once, and yet he did not go back.

He had taken his ticket to the nearest junction ; from there he meant to tramp northwards. It seemed to him the only thing to do, to free Selina from the strain of his presence, from the danger of his violence.

He did not see how it might look to others, that it might appear as if, when he knew her trouble was approaching, that a burden was to be added to him, he had deserted her. No, he had made the only expiation that seemed possible to him. He was an exile from his home, from the only creature that loved him.

Selina waited for him again that night. She had spent her evening looking over, for the twentieth time, the little garments Mrs. Mayern had given her ; she was longing to tell Matt of their interview, of Cythna's sweetness, of how she had cried at Selina's news, of how she had even kissed her. It had been a happy day.

Surely it was not going to be spoilt.

But he did not come.

She laid her head down on the table, and the tiny clothes which Cythna had made for her own child that died were moistened by other tears than hers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE time went by, and Selina began to realise the fact that Matt had really left her. At first she would not believe it. He would come back, she said ; she was sure of it. He would be home to-morrow, the next day, the day after. But before long she ceased to say anything about it. She wept and prayed and waited. At the very beginning she had naturally feared he had met with an accident. Cythna made inquiries at the hospitals and elsewhere, but the man at the railway booking-office, who knew Furth by sight, set their minds at rest on this score. He had taken a ticket and gone away. Cythna broke it to Selina.

“I don’t understand why he done it,” she sobbed. “He was that kind to me the very mornin’. He spoke so lovin’. He didn’t

seem—but he must have been thinkin' this——” she broke off suddenly, remembering what he had said: “You’ve been a dear little wife to me, Selina. . . . You’ve ~~got~~ friends——” Yes, he was saying “good-bye” to her, and she had not known it. “Promise me that whatever come you’ll think as kind of me as you can.”

She realised all at once why he had done it. He had gone away for her sake. But she could not explain. She could only refuse to listen to anything against him, shut her ears to the cruel hints that reached her, and be silent and endure.

If she said even to Cythna what she thought to be the truth she must speak of his degradation, say that he had struck her, bear pity at his expense. Her great love made her loyal to him, against Cythna, against all the world. She refused to have any further inquiries made about him.

“I don’t want him follered nor tracked. He’ll come home when he see fit; I only wish he knowed I don’t think no harm against him, that I want him back.”

People who came to her, either with sym-

pathy or from curiosity, found her gentle but quite unresponsive. "She's givin' herself airs," they said. "Pride ain't becomin' in a deserted woman." "She don't seem to realise as a man'd scarcely go off like that *alone*." "I believe she'd take him back if he'd come," and so forth.

Even the Millards, who had been Matt's friends, believed the worst of him. Mrs. Millard was the more indignant because she considered that she had brought about the marriage, and had openly boasted of it, and now it had turned out a disastrous failure. Millard, as a temperance advocate of decided opinions, had been for some time wavering between a desire to convert Matt and a disgust of his manner of life, which made him avoid him. Mrs. Shears was violent in her denunciations of his conduct, and yet conscious of a sneaking gratitude to him, which made her glad when Selina forbade her to speak against him.

At last, one day, as if in answer to her prayers Selina received a letter. She was able to say proudly: "I have heard from my husband".

She showed the letter to no one, not even

Mrs. Mayern. She only said : " I have heard from my husband ". It was a brief letter, misspelt, blurred, but it had taken hours to write. This was it :—

" Selina, i been thinkin aboot yer i dun it fur the best, gurl".

" Is there any address?" Mrs. Mayern had asked.

" No," answered Selina briefly. After a while, she added : " I wish there was. I would have written to him. Oh, ma'am, do you think I can go on bearing of it?"

But she was very brave in her loneliness, very independent. She would take no help if she could avoid it.

" When I get past workin'," she said, " I must for the child's sake. I couldn't abear it should be born anywhere 'cept in *his* home. But while I can work, I'll do what I can."

She resumed her former avocation of quarter-master, which she had abandoned since her marriage. Her place had not been filled, and the women who had employed her before did so again, though they scolded her for doing the work. She smiled away their objections.

“ I’d best be occupied someways,” she said. “ It’ll do me good to see the streets and that, and I can arrange my marketin’ at the same time.”

Sometimes, when the parcels were heavy, she would take one of the Shears children to help her. Mostly she went alone. It was on one of these latter occasions that she met a foe, as she might almost consider him, and a friend. The sight of the former might justify her in feeling, had she desired to, that his punishment had begun. As it was, it filled her with pity and with dread ; pity of what he was, dread of what Matt might become.

It was a snowy evening but Selina had no umbrella, partly because her only possession of this kind was an old one of her grandmother’s that would not have been much protection to her, and partly because her pawn tickets were in her pocket, and by-and-by she would have to carry a child’s pelisse, a skirt elaborately trimmed with moth-eaten fur, and Mrs. Gripper’s velveteen. In addition to this, there would be the little package containing her Sunday’s dinner, which was to be purchased in Market Street.

She was standing before a stall, hesitating

between the rival charms of pork and tripe, when she heard the sound of crying, and turning, saw a little fellow of about five years old standing behind her, with his finger in his mouth and his mouth wide open, while the snow fell on his pale face and mingled with the tears running down his cheeks. Selina loved children, and could not bear to see them unhappy, so quickly deciding on the fragment of pork, she tucked it under her shawl, and took hold of the boy.

"Now then," she said, "tell me what is the matter."

The finger came out of his mouth.

"I've lost Sissie," he sobbed.

"Who is Sissie?" inquired Selina. "Is she your sister?"

"Yes."

"I don't suppose she's far off," said Selina. "How did you come to lose sight of her?"

"I—I wanted to—see them olanges," he confessed, pointing to a stall containing a pile of yellow, sour-looking fruit.

"And where was she standing?"

He looked round vaguely and shook his head.

"Well," said Selina, "hold my hand, and we'll walk round together, and see if we can find her. You keep your eyes open. Is she big or little?"

The boy, who, having attracted attention to himself, had ceased crying, said "Bid," and obediently took hold of Selina's hand and accompanied her through the now increasing crowd; but he did not find his sister, ^{not}~~neither~~, when asked what she had on, could he give any satisfactory information whereby Selina might identify her.

"How old is she?" asked Selina.

To this he answered after meditation, "A long time".

And Selina gave up the notion of discovering her.

"I wonder," she said, "if you know your way home. Do you know where you live?"

He nodded decidedly.

"Where, then?"

"In our road."

"Do you think," she asked, "you could find it?"

He nodded again.

"If oo come too," he said.

"Yes," said Selina, "I'll come. Show me the way."

She had evidently inspired him with confidence, for, still holding tightly to her hand, he began to make his way through the people with a definite persistence which caused Selina to ask him why, if he knew his way home, he had cried, to which he answered: "'Acause I couldn't find Sissie".

He led her along till they came to some poor places, not very far from the docks. Here he quickened his pace almost to a run, but still kept his hold of Selina's hand, and at last stopped at a door.

"Here," he said, looking up at her.

And pushing it, for it was open, he dragged Selina into the passage.

"Now you're safe, I'll go," she said. "Good-bye. Leave go, dear."

But before he had relinquished her hand, for he seemed loth to part from her, a voice called feebly, "Is that you, Sissie?"

"No," shouted the small boy, "I've losed Siss. It's anover."

A woman came out and peered into the dim passage.

"Who is it?" she asked.

Selina explained what had happened.

"That come of leaving of Sissie," said the boy's mother severely. "I expect a nice way she's in. Thank you," she said to Selina. "Step in."

"I don't know as I ought," said Selina, obeying nevertheless. "But if you tell me what your daughter is like, I'll p'raps meet her and say he've come home."

"Oh, she won't worrit really," answered the woman. "She'd know he'd come back."

The room was dinly lit by a strongly-smelling lamp, but still Selina could see how ill the woman looked. She was only partly dressed. Bitter as the evening was, and though the fire in the grate was small and appeared to give no heat, the woman was only apparently wearing her nightdress, a flannel petticoat and a shawl. The bed was unmade, or had but just been left. Seeing the girl glance at it, she said:—

"I've just crawled out to do a bit of work. I'd oughtn't, I know, for I've ~~got~~ pleurisy, but

I want to get some of these done. It's nigh Christmas now."

Then Selina noticed that on the table were several little fairies, dressed in tinsel, and also some walnut shells, which had to be made into baskets, covered with gold paper, and filled with moss.

As if every minute were precious, the woman, Mrs. Parbury by name, seated herself on the broken chair by the table and drew the glue pot towards her.

"You ain't fit," said Selina.

Mrs. Parbury smiled.

"No more I ain't," she said. "But I gets one and sixpence a gross for these, and they're ordered, and I can't let it go."

"Can't you do 'em in bed?" asked Selina.

"No, it's too fiddlin'; the things gets lost in the clothes, and the glue and that's messy. I can get along," she said, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"I wish you'd let me help," said Selina in her impulsive way. "I could do that glueing, and I'd like to. And the rest'd do me good."

Mrs. Parbury looked at her.

"Sit you down," she said.

Selina set to work, and in half an hour, with her quick fingers, had considerably added to the pile of baskets. Mrs. Parbury, though so weak that, as she told her visitor, she could hardly maintain her "quillibrum," also made some progress, habit having given her the power of working mechanically.

Before the half-hour was over, a girl came running in, covered with snow, her face blue and red with cold, and her short arms clasping several parcels.

"There y'are," she said to her brother, who had slunk round to Selina's side as if for protection. "I have a good mind to smack yer, leadin' me a race lookin' for yer. Who's that?" she asked, suddenly breaking short and staring at Selina.

"I found him," Selina answered, rightly surmising that this was Sissie. Not that she by any means answered to the sort of person she had expected. She was a tiny, wizened creature, not more than ten years old.

"They're my only two left," said Mrs.

Parbury, "her and Frank. I mostly bury 'em at the month."

"I've got his blanket," announced Sissie in her shrill voice.

"That's the lodger's," explained Mrs. Parbury to Selina. "We used to put ours in every mornin' and the children's boots at night, but we can't manage it now. You'd best take it him," said she to Sissie. "He's been coughin'. I daresay he'll be glad to git into bed."

Sissie, who had flung her parcels on the floor, picked up the largest, and apparently the heaviest, and staggered into the next room. As the door opened Selina heard the sound of a cough.

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Parbury, with as much compassion as if she herself stood in no need of commiseration. "I'm afraid he's bad. He don't take proper care of himself. He'll be out any weather. He's only been here a month, and I can see a change in him myself."

"Hasn't he any one to look after him?" Selina inquired.

"Seems not. He's polite spoken, too. He goes to the docks every now and then, and gits enough to live on, I s'pose. He've paid regular as to rint.— Goin' ? Well, I'm grateful to you, and that's a fack, comin' in like an angel, as you might say. I think I might get back to bed now."

Selina laid her piece of pork down on the table beside the fairies.

"Just keep that, will yer ?" she said. "It ain't much, but it'll be tasty."

"No, that I won't," said the woman, glancing, nevertheless, with hungry eyes at the morsel of meat, from which the paper had fallen back. "It's yours."

"I can get a dinner easy," said Selina. "Never mind about me."

"He's goin' out," cried Sissie, coming back. "He might have getted his own blanket. It was heavy."

"Goin' out in this snow ?" said Mrs. Parbury. "What takes him ?"

As she spoke the step of the lodger was heard, and a tall form came past the door where Selina stood.

"You ain't never goin' out," said Mrs. Parbury, "after being in all day."

"That's why," said a hoarse voice. "I've got restless, m'm, and your room doesn't give me scope for exercise."

As he turned to speak Selina caught sight of his face. It was thin and haggard to a degree. Approaching death was written there. She recognised him, however—it was Dilkes.

"Well," said Mrs. Parbury with a sigh, "if he get ill he must go to the 'firmary, that's all. I can't nurse, seein' as my own husband's in the 'ospital with inflamed tonskles and inside complications.-- Good-bye, my dear, the Lord bless you."

Selina left with the glow occasioned by the performance of a good action making a warmth and even happiness about her; but it died away, and she could only think of the man in front of her. He walked with tottering, uncertain steps. Once he paused and leant against a wall, shaken by such a terrible fit of coughing that Selina was alarmed. She stopped too, at some little distance, watching him, longing yet afraid to offer him assistance. She did not seem as if she could

pass him and go on her way, although she was in some haste to get back. She had her work still to do, and she did not wish to be late and keep up her clients.

At last she ventured to approach him.

"Can I do anything for you," she asked timidly.

They were near a gas lamp. The man, looking at her, surprised at the gentle tone and manner, knew who she was.

He shook his head in answer to her question, and she was about to move on. But his voice, feeble as it was, arrested her.

"You're Matthew Furth's wife?"

"I am," said Selina proudly.

"Poor girl. . . . I believe I've had a hand in ruining him. Try—and save—him. I loved—a woman once. She might—have done it. Now go on."

The girl moved away, her heart too full for words.

Dilkes waited awhile, then he, too, stumbled forward.

At the first public-house he came to he pushed the glass doors open and went in.

Selina began to feel very tired. She had walked too far. She was glad when she came to her usual haunt. She might perhaps be able to rest again, for a few minutes at any rate. The shop was usually fuller in winter than summer. She might lean against the wall, and watch the people ; she had begun to look at faces with the power of discerning something of what they meant, and to take to heart the sin or the sorrow of which they spoke.

When she entered, she heard an exclamation of pleasure, and some one took hold of her hand and began to shake it energetically.

It was Brassy Jimmy.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. SWEETLOVE had not settled at the Potteries, but, since his exodus from his old quarters, had led a roving life, and employed his talents in various ways, none of them strikingly advantageous to himself, but still sufficiently so to keep him in comfortable circumstances and give him some interest in life.

He was helping at the present time to get up a "genuine" case of destitution. Brassy knew a good deal about many local charities, and the rules that applied to them; something, also, of benevolent and philanthropic agencies of wider scope; and now and then acquaintances of his who had not wit enough to manage the deception well themselves applied to Mr. Sweetlove to aid them in deceiving those who came in response to the appeal which had been

made, for pecuniary aid, for blankets, shoes, or coals. When required so to do, Brassy seldom refused his support. He would temporarily make away with the blankets or the boots, he would increase the family by the addition of two or three poor, ragged children; sometimes they were afflicted children, deaf and dumb, or blind, or crippled, so that the heart of the visitor was touched, and his report a sorrowful one. Not only children could Jimmy produce, but on occasions there was a poor old grandfather unable to work, or a bedridden ancestor of the other sex, or an idiot of either that would sit in the corner and gibber, and make the visitor, especially if she were a lady, unwilling to stay too long. Now and then Jimmy lent the light of his presence so as to inspire confidence in the others, to do the talking, or to supply a necessary but defective part.

On this occasion there were a few articles of furniture to be temporarily got rid of, and some rubbish substituted for them. Jimmy, as stage manager, had presented himself this Saturday evening at the pawnbroker's best known to him.

"Why, Jimmy," said Selina, pleased to see him, for she retained an affection for this disreputable friend of her childhood even while she lamented his evil courses, "what brought you here?"

"What brought me here?" repeated Jimmy with a grin. "Well, a lady's ridicule chiefly."

"A lady's what?"

"A lady's ridicule. One of them dangling bag things."

"Jimmy!" Selina looked at him sadly, quick to understand his meaning. "You haven't been stealing, have you?"

"Now, Selina," replied Mr. Sweetlove, "don't go insultin' of me. Steal! of course not. Only I wanted to come up, and I fancied the rail'd help me, so I spotted the ridicule near the Edgware Road."

"Then you did steal it?"

"No, I *didn't*. I just took it as it was hangin' tempting near her waist. After a bit she see's she've lost it. And up I ran, and says, quite rispeckful, 'Ma'am, this is yours, I fancy'. 'Oh, thank you,' says she,

relieved, 'thank you,' and gives me sixpence. There weren't no harm in that, surely. If I hadn't put her on her guard some one else would have prigged it. It's them sort of females tempts men to stealin'. So here I am. And how are you? You're lookin' peaky in the face."

"I'm rather tired," said Selina.

"What are you out alone for? Where's yer man?"

Selina was silent. Jimmy was ignorant of what had happened. He, however, immediately gathered that something was wrong, or Selina would not be at her old pursuit, unattended, and on such a night.

"See here," said Brassy, "git yer work over. Mine's done. I'll carry yer parcels and conduct yer home."

So it came about that before long Mr. Sweetlove was piloting her through the crowded streets with great dexterity, exchanging witticisms with those he elbowed out of the way, clasping the old clothes, supporting Selina, and talking hard all the time. His presence did the girl good. It

seemed to her that she had so many happy old associations with Jimmy. She knew he was fond of her, and the knowledge comforted her when she was feeling so desolate, and though he might not be a heroic or lofty character, still we are all disposed to be merciful to those who cheer or help us, and Selina was beginning to realise the infinite wisdom which dictated the command that we should not judge one another.

When they got into a quieter part, and conversation was easier for her—Jimmy had found no difficulty before—she told him of her meeting with Dilkes. Jimmy was interested.

“I knew he’d gone from the old place. Couldn’t pay his rint, I dessay. The last time I see him he spoke of hookin’ it from that part. I think he missed his pal—meanin’ me—but maybe I flatter myself. I never had much opinion o’ that Dilkes. A vice is all very well, let each choose his own, but when it get hold of you, and rather hinders than helps yer through life, a

wise man had best part company with it. He was a gettin' a nuisance to his friends, too, Dilkes was. He and Furth were thick at one time. S'lina," he coughed apologetically, "I haven't asked yer. How is yer husband?"

"Oh, Jimmy," said Selina, "don't you know? Haven't no one told yer?" She gave a sob she could not check.

"What is it, S'lina?" said Brassy becoming alarmed. "You ain't—ain't a widder—are yer?" in a hoarse whisper.

Selina shook her head. Then she burst out crying in the street.

"He've gone away," she said.

Down went the velvetten, down went the pelisse, and down went the fur-trimmed skirt. Jimmy flung up his hands and brought them together with a violent exclamation not fit for ears polite.

"Gone away, S'lina? Left yer? Left *you*, a wife as any man might be egscused for lovin'? I grudged yer to him, but I did think he was a decent sort of a feller, even if he was rather weak in the head-piece. I said it wouldn't turn

out well, I know, but I didn't wish as my words'd come true. Here, hold cryin', old gal. Leave them packages alone. I'll pick 'em up. Tell me all about it."

And Selina told him. And what is more, she told him the truth, told him more than she had any one else. He was a curious confidant to choose, perhaps, but Selina felt he was more capable than others of understanding, less likely to judge Matt's shortcomings. To some extent she was right. Brassy was angry enough with the man, but to Brassy the seamy side of life was too much a matter of course for him to launch into violent denunciation of any one. As for men beating their wives, to Mr. Sweetlove it was a matter of surprise that cases were not more common, the majority of women being, in his estimation, a mere ^{aggravation} ~~aggravation~~ to their husbands, with too little sense and too much tongue. But that any one should hit Selina, the one woman he had singled out for his enduring affection, was another matter, and Mr. Sweetlove spoke his mind.

"Still," he concluded, "I'm glad he had the decency to leave yer. That showed a bit of

pluck in Furth. Do you get along pretty comfortable now?"

"Oh, Jimmy," cried Selina, "don't you understand? I love him. I want him back."

"Well, I'll be jigged. What idiots women is! You want him back to go on with the hittin' business. S'lina, I hoped you had more spirit. But there, I'm your pal, mind, though you wouldn't let me make you happy. And you can always count on me to serve yer—if not too inconvenient. I'm a gentleman at large, as the saying go."

Selina thanked him through her tears.

"Have you been a corresponding?" asked Jimmy.

She told him about the letter she had just had, but which she was unable to answer, because it bore no address.

"I don't think he want me to write, Jimmy," she said sadly. "He never loved me, yer know. It was me as was set on him all the time. You can't expect as a man could see much in me after that other."

"See here, Selina," said Jimmy emphatically,

"she wasn't fit to shine yer boots. She was a empty-headed thing no better than a picter. She hadn't no contents in the way of heart neither. I don't know as I hev much opinion of *him* now, if you'll excuse me speakin' plain about your husband, but I do say he'd hev been throwing himself away on that screaming machine which, in my opinion, wasn't no better than she should be."

Jimmy delivered himself of this tirade on Mrs. Gripper's doorstep.

They were nearly home now. They turned into the street where Matt had lived.

"Stoppin' in the same place?"

"I'm tryin' to hold on just for a bit, but the rent'll be beyond me if he don't come back."

"And what'll you do then?"

"I don't know," said Selina.

"See here, Selina," said Brassy suddenly, "I'll try and find him for yer. I'm a sort of amiter detective, as you might say, and I've got friends in most places, and I can generally earn my livin' as well in one part as another. I'm not one of your stick-to-a-trade sort. I'll try

and find him, and let him know he've been a fool, and he'd best come home and be happy."

Selina grasped his arm in her excitement.

"Jimmy, how could you?"

"Bless me, I can manage most things. I don't see why I shouldn't do that. Of course, I can't go runnin' up and down England, but I can do a bit of trackin', if you give me a startin' point. This 'ere letter, now. There wasn't an address maybe, but there must have been a bit of information on the postmark. That'd be something to begin on. The thing'd interest me." —

"What did I go for to do that for?" asked Mr. Sweetlove of himself as, having parted from Selina, he stood alone in the street. "I'm in for a reg'lar wild-goose chase, along of a woman as loves another man. I didn't think I was sich a fool. Still, it ain't much odds to me where I go for that matter. I know dodges enough to come it over the railway bosses, anyway, and a change of air and the chance of givin' that chap what he much need, a bit of my mind, mayn't dis-

agree with my constitootion. Still, I thought I was too old a bird to be got over by any female's briny drops, even Selina's. Fancy me turnin' a night errand, as they calls 'em, at my time of life, and with my knowledge of human natur'."

CHAPTER XVII.

MATT meanwhile was suffering more than his wife. When he alighted at his journey's end he almost regretted the step he had taken, and had half a mind to tramp back again to London. Yet he resolutely set his face away from it, and went onward. He was homeless, friendless, and well-nigh penniless, but he had a strong conviction that he had done the only thing that was possible to avert terrible consequences. The mingling of wild passions and almost girlish sensitiveness, which left this strong man so much at the mercy of circumstances, and which made him act at one time like a brute, at another like a Quixotic gentleman, had led him to take this course and to persist in it, but, at the same time, to be fiercely conscious that he would probably descend lower and lower in consequence.

He had nothing to hope for now, nothing to live for ; he would work when he could find work to do, not from any honourable ambition, or for the sake of any other human being, but just to get the wherewithal to satisfy the craving for drink, to lull the aching of remorse and longing !

So he tramped onward, living from hand to mouth. It was not difficult for him to find jobs to do ; his physical strength was great, and there was something attractive about the man that led people to trust him. For a short time he was at the docks in Liverpool. It was from there he wrote to Selina.

He scarcely knew what induced him to write. He had meant to drop utterly out of her life, but her image haunted him at times, and he felt a pity for her that came very near akin to love. After all, she was only an ignorant child, and she had trusted him and loved him. How poorly he had repaid her. She had been willing to give him all she had—was it her fault that he loved another woman ? And yet, was it *his* fault that he did so ? The fault was in his having married Selina, but she had, as it were,

given herself to him. Still he could have been happy with Selina once. Only circumstances had been too strong for him. Who was to blame? Sam? Mary? himself? or that mysterious power we call fate?

Well, there was only one thing to be done. He had made a mess of his life. But there was a friend left him. He could forget—for a little while at least. Only the fits of remorse came. As he lay on his bed in the casual ward, or under a hedge at noonday, he would see the face of his girl-wife, with the mark of his hand on her brow, and her loving, tearful eyes looking at him while she told him what once would have given him such happiness to learn. He had a great love of children—he had it still. Once, when he had only a penny in his pocket, he gave it to a woman because the baby at her starved breast was wailing. He had his old hatred of suffering. This and a desire inconsistent enough, seeing that he had deserted her, that Selina should not altogether think badly of him, made him go without his dinner in order to buy paper and envelope and stamp, and send the girl her letter. Inconsistent, perhaps,

but people more capable of analysing their actions than this poor, rough fellow, surprise us by similar inconsistencies.

As the weeks went by a curious thing befel. It seemed as if he were beginning to love Selina. Perhaps it was because he had injured her, perhaps because already, after this short time, he no longer seemed to himself the same young, happy, careless fellow that had looked on Mary Dove and flung his heart at her feet, that had laughed with his mates and played with the Millard children, and drunk with Dilkes out of sheer light-hearted interest, and been swayed by his old mother and Mrs. Mayern. No, that man had died with Sam Peckitt, died when the demon of anger and jealousy took possession of him. There was not even a memory left of what he had been before Selina came and found him morbid in darkness and distrust and dreariness, and did her best to save him. He was falling little by little then. Was it his good angel wrestling with him now that made him forget any but the immediate past, and so think more and more of, long more and more for, Selina? Sometimes he

thought of going back. But he had not the moral courage. She had never had an unkind word or a word of blame for him, and he felt he should lose the only good left him if he returned and she reproached him now. He could not face Selina.

Such, roughly, were the workings of his mind when he thought, but he did not always think. There were periods of dogged, sullen hopelessness—periods when he lived a life ~~little better~~ ^{worse} than that of an animal—periods when his mind was utterly dormant. These times were easier to bear than those of greater mental activity.

One thing never stirred within him, one emotion seemed for ever dead, and that was hope; but from time to time its brother, fear, would take possession of him and urge him onward, he knew not and cared not whither. It was a new thing this fear—this awful dread which seemed almost as much physical as moral. He had scarcely known before what fear was in any form. Perhaps it came in part from his nervous exhaustion, from the state of unnatural excitement in which he had

lately lived, from the fact that he had insufficient food and no companionship, from one or all of these.

It was all so different from the life to which he had been accustomed from boyhood, which, if monotonous, had not been unhealthy—the regular work, the regular hours for meals, the similarity of interests around him, the familiar scenes day by day. Here all was strange, and for ever changing. And he moved like a shadow among shadows.

Once, as he tramped northward, he drew near to a railway steam shed, where some men were on the night shift. He was cold and weary, and he saw the light of the fire. Besides this, there was something about the place which reminded him of his home. He had been in these sheds before, and knew the ways of the men who worked in them.

The men, having got well forward with their labour, had cooked their midnight meal, and were spinning yarns to one another round the fire. Talking and eating, they were very comfortable. Presently one of them rose and went for a turn round.

Matthew Furth was standing near the large grate filled with the fire used for getting up steam. He had been walking all day, and was nearly worn out.

"Perhaps," he said to the fellow who came up to him, "you won't mind me lying down by this blaze. It's a chilly night."

The man grinned. He was not unused to such casual visitors. The light of the live coals often attracted tramps.

"That ain't our way," he said. "We're more hospitable inclined. Don't make any mistake about that. It'll drizzle by-and-by, and you would get rheumatics. Come inside. It ain't so draughty there. You're tired?"

Matt nodded.

"We'll make you up a bed. Be hanged if we won't. You don't look as if you've done much in the sleeping line lately. If the old woman's potato-pie hadn't been so good, you should have had some of that. Howsoever, I expect there's something in the victual line inside, though they're at it with their grinders still."

So he was led in by this good Samaritan, warmed, and fed by the contributions of the

other hands ; and, finally, one of them made up, in the corner of the shed, a bed of planks covered with straw, a resting-place by no means to be despised by the weary man.

He caught fitful snatches of the conversation that went on, talk such as would have interested him at one time. There were tales told of famous strikes in which the men had been concerned, anecdotes about employers, accounts of adventures "on the road," stories, too, of self-sacrifice.

By degrees the voices of the men sounded lower and further off, and at last he fell asleep.

He slept for three or four hours, waking, however, at intervals, disturbed by the noise of the passing trains, which would cause him to start up alarmed, and then sink back again, to lie in a state of dreamy satisfaction, because he was safe and warm, and there were cheerful human beings about him. And the day seemed distant. But towards morning he had a frightful dream, and awoke with a cry that made one of the men come to him.

"What is it, mate?"

"I dreamt," said Matt still trembling, "that I was in hell."

The man laughed.

"It was the trains booming by, and the fires a-shinin', and us a-movin' about, and perhaps Bill's pasty."

But Matt glared gloomily in front of him.

"Cheer up, old feller," said another coming out of a dark corner. "Why, I doubt myself if there is such a place, 'ceptin' in the parsons' minds. I don't believe in no hell, nor no devil."

"Man," cried the tramp fiercely, "there *is* a hell, there *is* a devil. There's a hell here. There may be a worse one, I don't know. But it's bad enough to be in the fire of your sins, with your conscience gnawing. The devil! I've served him. I know," he went on rapidly and with increasing vehemence, "what it is to be tempted and yield, and be tempted and yield again and again, and each time the fall's easier. And there's *no pleasure in sin*. Folks say there is. I've heard 'em laugh and say sin has pleasure. It's a lie. It seems as if it'll be pleasant aforehand, but you fight and say, 'I won't, I won't yield,' and you do, and that minute you feel what you really knew before, that it ain't pleasure; and the moment you've had your fill

you know it surer. There's a hell here, and I've been in it, wakin' as well as sleepin'."

He stood up.

The firelight illumined his haggard face.

The men fell back as he passed from their midst into the chill morning twilight.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was early spring. The joy of the season of hope was in the air. Its influence was borne on the breezes from sweet and sunny country places to the less-favoured spots where nature and her beauties were unseen ; its subtle presence stole into the hearts of men and women, and like the odour of a flower aroused memories and longings and gentle thoughts amid the dreary and sordid feelings of their daily lives.

Spring was coming, was come. A friend sent Mrs Mayern a box of lilies of the valley.

“ Will not these tempt you to come to us for a little while ? Leave your dreary London. There are primroses in all the hedgerows, and the nook you remember by the study window is full of violets. Last night there was a glorious sunset. I said to my husband, ‘ Cythna must

see our home before the spring is over'. I remember your love for lilies. If you want any more, come and fetch them. If these fail to bribe you, perhaps our love will avail to bring you."

Cythna smiled and sighed. She was not deceived as to where true joy was to be found, even when flowers and friendship drew her aside. Still, she needed rest.

"Perhaps the lilies will be over," she said to herself. "But there will be something else. The roses bloom there early. I must wait a little while."

Then she gathered up the greater number of the lilies and took them to Selina.

Mrs. Mayern's daily visits were Selina's only delight. She scarcely saw any one else except the Shears, and no other society but that of her lady-friend was quite congenial to her. Other people jarred on her now that she was not strong. She wanted to sit quiet, with her thoughts, her work, and Elsie's little bird.

The bird was so bright and happy, it did her good. She liked to watch it hopping from its perch to its food and then returning with a hemp

seed in its beak. to be consumed before another expedition to the store was undertaken ; or taking its bath with much splashing of water, and then sitting with ruffled feathers and a rakish expression while it combed itself with its beak ; or walking about her table when she took her meals, picking up crumbs with extraordinary eagerness, and eating, Mrs. Mayern declared, more than Selina herself.

When the girl felt depressed the song of the tiny feathered creature made her consciously happier. It had acquired a habit of giving forth a flow of rippling notes very softly, and there was something peculiarly sweet and soothing about such music, different from the shrill notes of some birds that might have tired or annoyed her when, as often happened, she was worn out by long nights of wakeful weariness. There was, too, a sense of companionship about its presence. It was pleasant to have some live thing, even a bird, to care for and tend.

This afternoon she was sitting in idleness, her hands folded on her lap, looking out of her window at the peep of blue sky overhead.

Her thoughts were so far away that she had not heard the light knock Mrs. Mayern gave, and only moved at her entrance. Then she uttered a low cry of joy, partly at sight of her, partly because Cythna had put into her outstretched hand the bunch of fragrant lilies.

"Oh, ma'am," she exclaimed delightedly, "do you really mean them for me to keep?"

She buried her face in them for an instant. When she looked up, there was a curious little smile about her mouth as of one who has just had a happy secret thought, and she immediately went to put the flowers in water.

"They'll look sort of welcoming if he comes," she said to herself. "Just a bit of something white and pretty, and the room'll smell so sweet with 'em."

"Have you been alone all the day?" Mrs. Mayern asked when Selina returned to her. "Mrs. Shears is out, I find."

"Yes," said Selina, "there was a boat come in; but she looked in on me before she left to see if I was all right."

"I wish I could spare more time to be with you," said Cythna, more to herself than to Selina. "I don't like your being by yourself so much."

"Oh, I'd rather," cried the girl eagerly. "Except you, ma'am, I don't want no one stoppin' long with me. If he was to come I'd like him to find me alone. He may be here any day now, ma'am, you see. I sit waiting quite happy with my thoughts. I go through that meetin' so often in my mind, all the different ways, it can't fail but one of them will be the right one."

She smiled to herself, and again her look was upraised to the little patch of sky, less blue now than formerly, for the days were short still, and the light soon failed.

Her cheeks had grown very thin and pale lately. There were great dark marks beneath her eyes. Suffering, or loneliness, or the consciousness of that which was coming upon her had given a depth and gravity to the expression of the eyes themselves. Indeed, the whole face was refined, chastened, spiritualised. That upward regard and the tenderness about her mouth,

and, withal, the exceeding youthfulness of her appearance, made Mrs. Mayern think of a picture she had seen in Italy of the Madonna.

Her quaint pathetic little friend, the quartermaster, had developed in an unlooked-for way. Selina would have been very much surprised if she had known that at that moment Mrs. Mayern felt something almost like reverence for her—the reverence of a noble woman for even the humblest creature touched with the beauty of sanctity.

“One thing I’m determined on,” said Selina, bringing her gaze back to Mrs. Mayern’s sympathetic face, “his comin’ home shall be a bright one. I shall just welcome him quite natural. Even if I should cry, and I might, because I cry so easy now, they’d only be happy tears. He’d know that. I shan’t let him believe it’s been hard waitin’. I don’t want him to reproach himself at having left me alone. I don’t look ill, do I? I don’t want to look ill. Of course, it’s natural I might be tired-looking, but I dare say that’ll go when I see him. Hark! what was that?”

“That’s Mrs. Shears come back, dear.”

The girl had started visibly and was trembling with excitement.

Mrs. Mayern took hold of her hand.

There was strength in the touch.

Selina was calm again in a minute, though the colour which had flamed into her cheeks had ebbed and left her very pale.

"I can't help thinking——" she said, and then paused. There was no need to finish, but she added after a while : " It must be soon, you see. Jimmy told him I was anxious. He wouldn't delay. It was wonderful Jimmy meeting him, wasn't it? I hadn't hardly dared to hope."

" How long is it since Mr. Sweetlove wrote to you? " Mrs. Mayern asked.

" Nearly a month now," said Selina. " I should think he'd be back soon himself. I'd like to see him and thank him. He found some work up there. I—I don't think," she added, with a quiver of the lips, " that Matt would stop for work—or anything, do you? "

She looked so wistful that Mrs. Mayern had to say " No ".

" Every day makes it more likely he'll come,"

said Selina. "I expect he's workin' his way back to me. He'll be here soon. I'm sure he'll be here soon. Perhaps to-day. But to-day is nearly over. It may be to-morrow. I can't help hoping it'll be before—before—— I want to be able to welcome him. It wouldn't be nice for him to find me ill. I want to be able to get his meals and all myself. A man had ought to have a happy home."

Cythna, glancing at the fragile creature, thought she did not look capable of much work. Selina was quick to interpret the look.

"Ah," she said, "you think because I am so idle now I couldn't do it. But when he comes it will be different. I shall be so happy." She laughed. "Love will make me strong. The sight of him will put life into me. You know that, don't you, ma'am?" She leaned forward eagerly. "Didn't *you* feel that way, ma'am, when your husband was away, and you were waiting for him? You loved him. You can understand."

"Yes, dear, I can understand," said Mrs. Mayern softly, "I can understand."

But she did not tell Selina that they were

never apart for more than an hour till *the* parting came.

"Did he care for you as much as you did for him?" asked Selina presently in a whisper, emboldened by the gathering dusk.

"We each gave all we had, my child, to the other."

"Ah."

The two women sat silent. For the moment / their common humanity merged all differences.

Selina spoke first.

"That must be happy to remember," she said. "But I don't seem to mind so much as I did that Matt loved—her—first. I think when he comes back he'll have got to—care for me. And even if not—I could bear it—I think I could bear it, if he'd like me only a little, and love—the child, our child. I believe the child'd be a help to him. He always loved 'em so."

She rose and fetched an old shawl to throw over the cage of her little bird, which had crept to the corner of its perch and made itself into a fluffy round ball. She put the tip of her finger through the bar and touched it tenderly, but the

bird did not stir. She looked at Cythna with a tremulous smile.

"Don't doin' things for creatures make you care for them?" she said.

She drew the shawl round the cage and made night for her feathered friend.

She leant against the side of the window and the fading light fell on her face.

"Doing," she said, "or suffering. It's curious, but—I love Matt more than I did afore he went away, far more than afore I married him. And *now*——" she did not finish her sentence. The tears stood in her eyes. "I daresay some people'd wonder to hear me say it," she went on presently, "but it's true. Whatever come, I wouldn't undo any of this. I wouldn't go back to bein' Selina Pask. Maybe it's because sorrow has taught me things I wouldn't have knowed. I can't say. But though I long as the waitin' should be over, I'm not wanting *now* as past should be undone. I feel so sure I shall forget it all when we meet. And my love makes me so happy, and the joy of seeing him will be so great, and afterwards—oh, ma'am," her voice broke and she ended with

a sob, "even now it's worth while—it's worth while."

"Light the lamp," said Mrs. Mayern presently ; "don't let me leave you in the dark. I will come again to-morrow."

Selina obeyed her.

"Shall I send Mrs. Shears up to you?"

"No, ma'am, thank you. Not yet, anyway. I'd like to be alone a little while. Thank you for coming." She stood at the door holding her friend's hand. "It looks comfortable here, don't it, ma'am? I must always feel so grateful you helped me to stay on. I wouldn't have Matt come and find his home changed. Those lilies, how sweet they look. Good-bye, ma'am. You'll come again to-morrow?"

"Yes, dear, I will come to-morrow."

"To-morrow," Selina repeated softly as she stole back to her room. "Perhaps there will be some one else here—to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

HOMEWARDS !

That dream in the railway steam-shed, vivid and terrible as it was, and acting on a temperament rendered morbid and susceptible to impressions by an overwrought brain, by excesses and by deprivations, had on Matthew Furth the effect of an awful warning. It was as if a vision had been given him of that which would befall. He was haunted by it. He went in fear and trembling and intolerable dread. His nerve was gone. He was afraid. He was afraid of God, of himself, of his fellow-creatures, of the shadows born of imagination.

"I shall go mad," he thought, "if I am alone any longer."

And then there came to him an intense longing

for his wife. If he could only look at her again, feel the clinging touch of her hand, hear the soothing tones of her voice, see the lovelight in her eyes—love for him ! the unloved, the desolate ! The desire seized him like a fever. He felt it in every drop of blood in his body, every fibre of his brain, every nerve of his being. It was not love which possessed him. It was the craving for love, the protest of human nature against the terror of solitude, the instinct of self-defence against the encroachments of insanity.

He was like one tottering over a precipice, who clutches at any hand stretched out to him ; like one going down into the jaws of death, where all is darkness, who clings to any creature near him, and finds help and comfort in the answering *human* touch.

Homewards !

He must see her. He must go to her. He *must*. But dared he ?

She had given him all she had to offer, and he had not valued the gift. How now could he ask for it ?

Yet he turned towards home, meaning to work

his way back ; so desperate was the yearning, it drew him despite himself.

Only once he hesitated again. It was at Liverpool. He had been helping to unload a ship's cargo. An emigrant ship was in the dock. She left that night for America. He went and looked at her.

A blind gentleman was leaning on his daughter's arm. She was describing to him the sights about them.

"Norah," Matt heard him say, "if I were young and strong I believe I should be tempted to go in that ship, even if I had to work my passage out ; the smell of the sea means health and liberty."

Matt felt his heart bound.

Why not ? Why should not *he* go and leave his past behind him ? Health of mind and body ! If he could find peace beyond these shores, if he could leave his failures and start afresh, if he could shape a future for himself, then perhaps some day he might come back to Selina and try to make reparation, then perhaps ——

A hand was laid upon his shoulder. He

turned and found himself face to face with Brassy Jimmy.

Then he learnt that he might go to Selina, that she wanted him.

With the knowledge something of the fear which had been with him passed away. Whether it were from superstition or an awakened conscience there had been upon him the greatest anguish a human being can know—for there is no escape from it—the belief that God has turned away from him. But it surely could not be if He had left him Selina. In the wave of gratitude that swept over the man when he knew that he was not quite deserted, he formed a resolve to struggle against his sin, to conquer it, however desperate the fight, even if it cost him his life.

Homewards!

There were delays. He worked, he begged. Once he lay ill for a few days at a workhouse infirmary.

But he went onward nerved by a stern determination.

And at last he came by night into the mean street where he had lived since his boyhood,

the place which had grown beautiful to him in absence, and he stood outside his home, longing, yet afraid to enter.

He stood there a long while. Then he moved away and walked up and down though his trembling limbs almost refused to support him. Should he wait till the morning? Should he go to her at once? What should he say? In what words should he ask her forgiveness? He crossed over and looked up. There was a light burning in her room. It shone through the blind. She was awake then.

He suddenly dashed across the road.

The door was unlocked. He turned the handle. He stumbled up the narrow stairs.

He stood there for a minute, leaning against the wall of the little passage, his heavy breathing laboured and audible as the sound of sobbing.

The door of the room opened and a soft voice said: "Who is there?"

It was Cythna Mayern.

Matt could not speak. But he moved forward and made as if he would enter.

Then Mrs. Mayern saw who it was. Involuntarily she stretched out her arm and barred the entrance. He could easily have pushed aside the soft barrier, but his old reverence for her restrained him. And she looked at him so compassionately, so gently.

"Matt," she said.

It seemed natural to see her there, even at night, but her presence had come to mean comfort, and where there was comfort there must be sorrow.

"Is she ill?" he gasped.

Cythna shook her head.

"No," she said, "she is not ill, Matt."

But she moved her arm from its former attitude and laid her hand on his rough one. And why were her eyes full of tears?

"Let me go in," he said hoarsely. "I have been away too long. But it is my home."

"Yes," said Cythna, "you have been away too long."

Her look or her words or his own fears, or the fact that Selina did not come at the sound

of his voice, which of these was it that told him the truth?

Cythna was making no effort to restrain him now, but he did not seek to go in. He waited out there in the darkness, looking at her in the light.

God had forsaken him after all. He was alone. Selina was dead. There was nothing left to live for.

He entered at last.

The room looked so neat and clean and pretty. There was an odour of flowers in the air. On the mantelpiece was a bowl of lilies. Cythna had not moved them.

He glanced round him, then falling heavily into a chair flung his arms on the table and hid his face upon them.

This was the end.

"Matt," said Mrs. Mayern.

He did not stir.

"Matt," she said once more.

He looked up wearily.

"She was very happy," said the sweet voice. "She always loved you, and she always hoped. It was only to-night that she was—taken away."

But God has sent an angel of life to your home as well as an angel of death. He has left you a pledge of His love, Matt. You will have to be both father and mother to it."

And she laid in his arms his little child.

CHAPTER XX.

"As for that," said Mr. Crapp who had been meditating on Mr. Cockle's last remark, as he wrapped in newspaper the haporth of "cough no more," which he now handed to a youthful purchaser, "as for that, it seems to me it depends on the parties."

"That's just what it don't depend on so far as I can make out," said Mr. Cockle. "I've seen it fail with excellent parties, and though I don't lay claim to be more'n human, I don't know as I've met many men more entitled to respeck."

Mr. Crapp did not rebuke his friend's want of humility. He merely put a piece of red rock into one of his scales, and a piece of white where the half-ounce weight usually rested. Then he lifted the scales and held them before Cockle.

"That don't hang right," he said.

"It don't," replied Cockle, "peppermink weighs heavier."

"It do," agreed Crapp. "Now, pep's an excellent thing, but the way to make it hang straight with rose wouldn't be to add more pep."

"That's so."

"What then? We can't add rose, because it's all sold out. So I takes my scissors, and snip! off comes an odd bit. How does that suit you?"

"They seem to about balance," said Mr. Cockle appropriating the broken piece.

Mr. Cockle never bemeaned himself by buying sweets, but he was not above eating them, especially such as had medicinal qualities. Mr. Crapp lost quite a shilling a year through his intimacy with Mr. Cockle.

"Now that's what it might be in married life," remarked Mr. Crapp. "One, we'll say, a bit overbalances the other. Well, if he's sensible, or if she's sensible, as the case might be, there'd be a little trimming done, somewhat given up. And they'd hang straight right enough."

"That's true, perhaps, Crapp; that's true, perhaps, in general cases," said Cockle with long intervals between the words, as the delicacy in his mouth made speech a difficult matter, "but there's individooal cases, you see. There's me and Sarah, as I was sayin'. How can I go on bearin' of her ways?"

"The same as she'd have to bear your's if you broke your back," said Crapp. "You have been properly married, I s'pose?"

"In course," said Mr. Cockle impatiently.

"Then you've vowed to take her for better, for worse, and it would be a cryin' shame for a man with your knowledge of scripiter to go agin the wedding service."

"If it wasn't for the lost tribes, which afford me solid comfort, life," said Cockle, "would be unendurable. I feel the time is drawing near when it will be my mission to expound concerning 'em to the Church of England clergy, beginnin', if need be, with the archbishop hisself. I'm fittin' myself for it, Crapp."

"Ah," said the sweetvender, whose belief in Mr. Cockle was (in these matters) only second to Mr. Cockle's belief in himself. "Well, there's

things about you uncommon like a prophet, and maybe they'll listen to you. It's clear, and they ought to see it."

"I'll make 'em," said Cockle with energy. "I've found prophecies about Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales in Daniel that there's no doubt about (I've underlined 'em in blue so as to find 'em easy), and there's prophecies about the last strikes as no one could fail to interpret. I've been thinkin' I could give Parli'ment some hints (I've underlined them verses dealin' with the labour question in yaller). But then——" he concluded with a heavy sigh, "there's always Sarah."

"See here, Cockle," said his friend, "Sarah's laid on you, and if you go neglectin' your duty to your wife, be she good or bad, you can't expeck to succeed in propheting. And it ain't worthy of you to stand and whine that marriage is a failure. P'raps, if your marriage hadn't been a failure, you would have been a ordinary chap that took no thought whatever to the lost tribes."

Cockle scratched his head meditatively.

"Maybe," he agreed.

At this moment Peckitt came along. He walked more slowly than of yore, and Eliza, getting into years, suited her pace to his. They halted by the stall.

"I've been a-telling Cockle," said Crapp, "as he ought to try and put up with his missus."

"Has she been trying of yer partiklar?" Mr. Peckitt inquired. "Well, your lot's a hard one. But there's one thing. You can get away from her. S'pose you was blind now, and couldn't manage to egscap?"

"Why, *you* manage to escape," said Cockle.

"Oh, that word don't apply to me," said Peckitt. "My old woman has a tongue, but it isn't a sharp one. And she take things pretty comfortable. Me and her grows fonder as we grows older, I think."

"What led to it," said Crapp, "was my telling Cockle as I'd heerd Matt Furth was a-goin' to try matrimony again. Leastways, we've been hearing that young woman was back with you."

Peckitt assumed his air of importance. This was one of the rare occasions on which he was the best informed of the party.

"Folks jump at conclusions," he said with

severity. "Mary, she've softened wonderful, and she've come back to help the old woman, who can't git about much. That don't say as she's a-goin' to marry Matt."

"Human natur' bein' what it is, I should consider it most likely," said Mr. Cockle.

"Human natur' acts contrary to what's likely as a general rule, Cockle," said Crapp. "Who'd have said, for instance, as Furth'd pull up short when he was goin' down hill fast enough? Why, Brassy Jimmy was tellin' me——"

"Brassy. Oh, he claims it was his doin'," said Cockle.

"Not him. It was Selina's death, I take it," said Crapp.

"Or the little 'un. He's wrapped up in that little 'un," said Peckitt.

Eliza wagged her tail, and offered no suggestion.

THE END.



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